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AN INQUIRY

CONCERNING

THE ETERNITY OF FUTURE PUNISHMENT,

IN EIGHT LETTERS TO A FRIEND.

WITH AN APPENDIX.

BY A LAYMAN.

OCCASIONED BY A SERMON FROM THE REV. H. MELVILL,
PREACHED IN ST. BRIDE'S CHURCH, FLEET STREET, ON BEHALF
OF KING'S COLLEGE HOSPITAL.

I said, I will answer also my part, I also will shew my opinion.---Elihu.

The Bereans were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed.---Acts xvii.

VERITAS PREVALEBIT.

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P R E F A C E .

IT is an acknowledged fact, however much to be regretted, that many sincere and excellent Christians have entertained very *erroneous* notions, and yet have thought them supported by Scripture, and while this impression remains it is impossible to persuade them to quit those opinions, for no person, who has a due regard to the Scriptures, will give up an opinion that he believes he receives upon Scripture-testimony, till, by *reconsidering* that testimony, he is convinced that he has mistaken the meaning of the text or passages on which his opinion is founded.

We, therefore, solicit thinking persons of judgment and candour, deliberately to search and seriously inquire upon what basis their views are grounded, for we advisedly affirm that the popular opinion, '*the Eternity of Hell Torments*,' is anti-scriptural, and no where a doctrine of the Bible when fairly interpreted, and if duly weighed in the balances of the sanctuary, it will be found wanting.

No rendering of the original terms or translation of words ought to be admitted which are made to be at variance with

the unity and perfection of the Divine attributes, because these must be the *only foundation and test of Scripture truth*; and if there be any such sense put upon any expression or passage in Scripture which makes it clash with itself, or conflicting with any of the *known* attributes of God, we may rest assured such passages or words must be either wrongly interpreted or misunderstood.

The inquiry is one of immense interest, as it involves and investigates an announcement respecting the future final state and condition of man. “But why disturb or call in question a *popular* doctrine, and one which the Christian public generally receive as a truth, there being *few* only who believe in the writer’s view of it, especially among Divines and Ministers of the Gospel, and are the minority in this case to determine?” I answer No; neither the *minority* nor the *majority*, but the word of God alone. There is a criminal subserviency of mind manifested in the Christian community to the dogmas of the day, in implicitly adopting opinions without duly investigating and ascertaining how far such sentiments comport with the unity and simplicity of Divine truth. Although mankind are universally made capable of knowing the truth, their progress towards it is slow and obstructed by many difficulties. What absurd errors have been received and consecrated by public authority, and by their antiquity become the formidable obstacles of truth, gaining such a fatal ascendancy, even over the minds of those whose understandings reject them, as leads them

to suppress the truth, and tacitly to immolate it at the shrine of falsehood, by imposing upon it the most rigorous silence, leaving to error, known to be such, the exclusive privilege of appearing publicly, and of being perpetuated and openly taught to the multitude.

But if the writer in his views differs from those generally held, candid and judicious readers will not be repulsed by the *cry of heresy*, for it was to Truth thus stigmatized that the *Reformation* owed its rise. Let them read, examine, and determine for themselves. Nor let the humble pious follower of the Gospel take the alarm, or apprehend the motives to virtue will be weakened and mankind grow more licentious. To behold the plan of Deity as more consistent with his nature and attributes, and more merciful to his creatures, can never be an incentive to vice; and we would ask, have the terrors of the Lord, when represented in all the horrors of *never-ending* torments, been sufficient to deter many from sinning who have been familiar with the idea from their infancy? Universal observation shows the contrary. But if there be a wretch so base as to sin because grace abounds, and with dauntless effrontery ventures to challenge the power and justice of his Maker, let him learn, that in proportion to his guilt and depravity will be his future punishment both in degree and duration. But let the honor of the wise and merciful Creator be vindicated, and mankind be taught to consider Him as altogether amiable, whose punishments are as much the effect of His

goodness as His rewards. Thus shall His *love* and His *fear* arise together in our hearts, and *wisdom be justified of her children*.

The contents of the Letters, it is believed, are founded upon reason, scripture, and the Divine attributes, and if read with attention, we doubt not the candid reader will perceive the force and feel the efficacy, by their introducing him to a more enlarged view of God's benevolence with respect to mankind in general, as well as the gracious designs of His providence in particular, so that he will be led from these considerations to comprehend a *consistent* Providence, and to *justify the ways of God with his attributes*, which we think no other view can do. It is manifest, and will be readily perceived, that the opinion of *endless* torments is based and is solely argued from the assumed meaning put upon a few ambiguous terms and equivocal words found in the original text; whereas the contrary opinion is grounded upon undoubted axioms and immutable principles, founded upon the known character of the Divine Being, and the arguments for its support are simple and true logical inferences, drawn from His attributes as revealed to us in Scripture. The infinite benignity of Deity is most seriously impeached by the opinion of *endless* torments,—the relative character of God as Creator is darkened,—and His *parental* character obliterated by the doctrine of a *miserable eternity*; but truth, however long it may be obscured, will finally be triumphant; it will make its way in spite of the

united influence of force and fraud, and it will one day enlighten the earth and bless mankind with its benign and cheering influence.

In reference to the Sermon upon which the Letters so freely comment, the writer begs most explicitly to repudiate any personality whatever as intended in his remarks; he has never had the pleasure of seeing or hearing the talented Preacher. A deep conviction of the truth and importance of the matter submitted, is the apology offered for committing to the press that which was intended originally for private perusal.

R. H.

Maidstone,

December, 1843.

AN INQUIRY AFTER TRUTH.

LETTER I.

Maidstone, Dec. 1843.

DEAR SIR,

MY attention has only recently been directed to the sermon preached at St. Bride's church, on Sunday morning, 15th Dec. 1839, at which you were present; it is published in "The Pulpit" for that month, and is now before me.

The incongruity of the subject discoursed upon, namely, "The *Eternity* of Future Punishment," with the occasion, a "charity sermon," is so apparent, that I am not surprised at the kind of apologies we meet with, or that the preacher should more than once caution his hearers against thinking the subject "irrelevant to the claims of King's College Hospital," or the "transition unnatural to the charitable cause" he was requested to plead; and what could be the motive, think you, for thus choosing?

I feel no hesitation in submitting, at your request, some observations upon its contents, for if it be correctly given to the public, the character and perfections of the Deity are, in my opinion, most seriously impugned by the sentiments and principles set forth in this very extraordinary sermon. The preacher says—

"We frankly own, that there is *something so awful in the fact of God's apportioning interminable misery to any of his creatures*, that we would willingly leave it in its fearful mysteriousness, and not make it the subject of prolonged argument or debate."

But surely, sir, there is something more than awful in this statement, and I would earnestly and solemnly demand, is such "*the fact*?" Can the Divine Being so act? St. John repeatedly assures us, that "God is love." Is it then true, that "OUR FATHER" created innumerable creatures to such a purpose, or

with the omniscience of such a result? I emphatically say No ! for I cannot conceive a grosser libel. All the ideas of *goodness* we are masters of fly in the very face of such an assumption, and the harmony and perfection of the Divine attributes, as revealed to us in scripture, forbid the adoption of such revolting sentiments. But this be far from God, “whose mercy endureth for ever.” He is Jehovah who changeth not ; “The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.” Read the cxlv. Psalm.

It is with unfeigned regret and surprise that I observe throughout the sermon, much declamation in the place of argument ; so many assertions instead of proofs ; so much that is hypothetical, rather than demonstrative ; a great paucity of scripture reference, with much that is dogmatical. Was it thought that the preacher’s name and attainments were a guarantee for truth, and would suffice to induce the audience to receive and adopt opinions and doctrines of such a momentous import unaccompanied by valid evidence ? or had he not duly studied the subject matter of his discourse ? In either case it is open to considerable animadversion. Controversy is by no means agreeable, and not often profitable, yet occasions may arise when it is needful, and if conducted with charity, and an honest and anxious desire *to know the truth*, and *not for victory*, it is not forbidden ; nay, were not the Bereans more noble-minded than their neighbours, because “they searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so ?”

We will endeavour, in the first place, to follow the preacher through his sermon, and inquire upon what basis he grounds the “*ETERNITY*” of future punishment. I shall afterwards submit to your notice some observations in reference to the *design* and *result* of future punishment, which is *not an end*, but a mean,—a dispensation of chastisement, conducted by infinite wisdom and immutable goodness, and beneficial to all in its final issue. I will then give some reasons why I cannot at present receive, as a truth, the popular dogma of the *Eternity* of hell torments.

The text is taken from Mark ix. 44—" *Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*"

These words are also found in the book of Isaiah's prophecy, the last chapter and part of the last verse, and indicate the punishment of those criminals whose bodies were either burnt in the valley of Hinnom, or permitted to lie upon the ground in the form of dead carcases, to be fed upon by worms, that delight in putrefaction ; but as the fire which burnt these bodies, and the worms which fed upon them, *have ceased* and are no more, the words do not bear out the preacher's assumption, and can in no other sense be said not to be quenched and not to die than this, that they continued till those carcases were entirely consumed, or that they remained to the end of the Jewish dispensation. We are, therefore, under no necessity of supposing, in direct contradiction to the scripture account, (for they are represented as *carcases*, or bodies, deprived of life) that the subjects that were destroyed by this fire must be *preserved alive* in a state of *never-ending* torments. That these emblematical expressions, and the phrase of "unquenchable fire," upon which so much stress is laid, do not denote a fire which shall never cease to exist is most certain, and the following passages afford the clearest evidence that they are used in scripture in a *limited sense*. "But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day ; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched."—Jer. xvii. 27. "Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man set thy face toward the south, and drop thy word toward the south, and prophecy against the forest of the south field ; and say to the forest of the south, Hear the word of the Lord ; Thus saith the Lord God ; Behold, I will kindle a fire in thee, and it shall devour every green tree in thee, and every dry tree ; *the flaming flame shall not be quenched*, and all faces from the south to the north shall be burned therein. And all flesh shall see that I the Lord have kindled it : *it shall not be quenched.*—Ezek. xx. 45—48.

I presume it will be allowed that these threatenings were actually executed when Jerusalem was destroyed, and it must be admitted that the fire which consumed it is already extinguished, and that therefore the scriptural meaning of an unquenchable fire is not one which is interminable. Again, in Isaiah, xxxiv. 9—11, we read, “And the streams thereof (the land of Idumea) shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. *It shall not be quenched night nor day ; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever ; from generation to generation it shall lie waste ; none shall pass through it for ever and ever.*” No fire, with which the wicked are threatened, is expressed in language so strong as this, yet it is most obvious that this phraseology cannot denote a fire which shall never come to an end, and it is impossible to suppose that it will continue burning throughout the ages of eternity. The quotation and use of these metaphorical terms by our Lord can give no additional force to their primary meaning.

We come now to the sermon, and the preacher says—
 “We purpose to endeavour to prove to you that the future punishment of the wicked will be eternal—that it will never terminate ; in opposition to an opinion, of which we fear that it has been gaining ground in the world, that this punishment will be but temporary, so that the inmates of hell shall be finally delivered. No opinion can be more dangerous than this ; it goes directly to the undermining the whole Christian system—to the destroying all its power as an engine for reforming the world. Men are so constituted, that if they could once persuade themselves of the truth of what is called universal salvation, they might fairly be expected to throw off all moral restraint. The essence of hell is the absence of hope ; and you must never look to prevail upon men to abandon present gratifications and submit to present hardships, if you have no “*worm*” with which to threaten them but a worm which will die, and no “*fire*” with which to *scare them* but a fire which will be quenched.”

The inferences which we gather from the above are, That the opinion of the “*Eternity*” of future punishment is a principal prop of the Christian system ! That its power as an engine for

reforming the world depends upon the truth of the doctrine of the *eternity* of hell torments! and, That unless the *eternity* of hell torments be dwelt upon and enforced from the pulpit, moral restraint will be destroyed and little good will be effected!

That any Minister of the *Gospel* (except we assume his mind to be overwhelmed with creeds and systems and barred by prejudice) should venture to express himself in such unmeasured terms, as we meet with in this sermon, does, we confess, excite our utmost astonishment, and is much to be deplored; there may be zeal in the preacher, but certainly it is not according to knowledge. Does *hell cease to be hell* merely because its duration is not eternal? and although it be supposed to be of *finite* continuance, is it therefore not *hell*? and if it may, in *some sense*, be considered a state of purification, it is only such in regard to its design and use, as a mean to an end; and in regard to the pains and torments proper to it, we may justly call it hell, and take the word in the whole extent of the ideas given us of that state in scripture, and consider it as a state of “wailing and gnashing of teeth,”—a state of privation and darkness,—a state of positive torments, faintly represented under the notion of a “lake of fire and brimstone;”—a state of devouring hunger and thirst, in opposition to the pleasures which men have tasted in this world;—of shame and mortifying confusion, in opposition to vain glory and love of praise;—of remorse and inward anguish, occasioned by an acute sense of our being the only authors of all the woes and misery we endure. When, therefore, we suppose that hell-torments will one day end, we do not depart from the ideas which both scripture and good sense give us of it. We may even make use of the words “everlasting,” “for ever,” &c. provided they be taken in the *same sense* as when applied to the dispensation of the Mosaic economy,—the Levitical priesthood,—the covenant of circumcision,—the hills,—the doors, &c., namely, of “æonian” duration; or, for an age,—ages,—age lasting, &c. And are the following denunciations of holy writ of no force and nothing *without such appendages*?—“Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest:

this shall be the portion of their cup.”—Ps. xi. 6. “God is angry with the wicked every day,”—Ps. vii. 11. “Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished.”—Prov. xi. 21. “The righteous judgment of God will render to every one according to his deeds : unto them that do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath ; tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil.”—Rom. ii. Let the preacher dwell to his heart’s content, if he will, upon the *awful certainty* of future punishment,—the indissoluble union of sin and misery,—the infinite opposition there is in the Deity towards sinners while in rebellion against him,—the immutable requirements and obligation of the moral law ; to all this the conscience will echo its assent, but he has *no divine authority*—no scriptural sanction, to endow sin and misery with the attribute of *eternity*. This it is which forms the Gordian knot in theology, “*the permission of evil* ;” take away its eternity, it unfolds itself ; and it is inconceivably more difficult to believe that sin and misery will continue as long as God exists, than to believe that omnipotent goodness and infinite wisdom will one day separate sin from his creatures, and annihilate it with all its consequences ; nay, His sanctity is immutably pledged to effect this ; and I will joy in believing that a period will come, when “The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying ; neither shall there be any more pain : for the former things (sin with all its concomitants) are passed away.”—Rev. xxi. 3, 4. *Then*, and not till then, shall be heard and sung by all intelligencies, the universal doxology, “Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto

him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”—Rev. v. 12, 13. Amen! Even so be it, Lord God Almighty.

There is a more excellent way than to “*threaten and scare*” men into the Christian religion; this may sometimes succeed with ignorant and vulgar minds. St. Paul has set an example worthy of imitation; his efforts were directed to *persuade* and *beseech* men, and God had committed unto him a “ministry of reconciliation;” his glorying was the “preaching of the cross,” Christ crucified, which is the power of God, and the wisdom of God. The *eternal* misery of mankind was no part of the ministry given to the apostles when they were sent forth to preach the gospel; they warned sinners that if they continued impenitent they would aggravate their guilt, but they were not commissioned to proclaim the *eternal* misery of all those who should neglect the gospel; their threats were occasional and *indefinite*; their promises absolute and intelligible,—LIFE,—IMMORTALITY. Their more acceptable office was to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation, and to assure the human race that the Son of God was not sent into the world to condemn the world, by proclaiming to the multitude the horrid tidings of damnation into *interminable* woe, but to call men to repentance and salvation. These considerations must surely evince that we are not under the painful and absolute *necessity* of explaining those solemn declarations, occasionally used respecting the punishment of the wicked, according to the *prevailing opinion* attached to them.

How and where did the preacher learn that “the essence of hell is the absence of hope”? Our Lord has said, “I have the keys of hell and of death,” and he visited that abode of wretchedness and woe, “*he descended into hell*,” when he was “put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the spirit; by which also (in his ghostly state) HE WENT and preached unto the spirits in prison;” and St. Peter informs us it was the gospel then declared. I. Pet. iii. 18—20. iv. 6. For the present I shall leave these very remarkable words, so pregnant with the utmost import in the economy of Grace; and if it be the will of God that

“the inmates of hell shall be finally delivered,” I presume no Christian man will object to such a result. That the “*Eternity*” of future punishment is the prevailing and the generally received opinion in the religious world we readily acknowledge, but we have yet to learn that this doctrine produces any very observable good effect, or proves a sufficient curb to prevent men going on in their wicked courses, neither has it operated on the mass of the people in stemming the wickedness in the land. Most men *profess to believe* in the truth of the doctrine, and their prejudices are not a little shocked when it is called in question, while some I could name have reminded me of a nest of owls, when the light is breaking, that wince and scream and shut their eyes lest the sun should put them out. What, therefore, can be the reason of this amazing indifference we find about an evil of so extreme a nature, which they profess to believe, and yet do nothing towards avoiding it? That the promulgation of the doctrine of *eternal* torments is not that moral restraint so much needed is too evident to require illustration, but cannot we account in some measure for this failure? One of the principal causes is, that this opinion is grounded on a *false basis*; it is not built on a right knowledge of the *attributes and perfections of God*, as revealed in scripture, which are, or ought to be, the basis of all religion. There is an impress existing on the mind of every thinking man (ingenitively perhaps) that GOD is an infinitely GOOD GOD—a Being of perfect justice (equity); that this pure and perfect Good cannot do or confer any thing but what is good, and did it communicate anything else it would contradict its own essence. This undoubtedly is the first and principal idea of God that offers itself to the mind, which idea is *not equivocal*, but positive and unchangeable, and most men, bad as they are, find within themselves some traces, though partly effaced, that bear witness to this truth of God’s goodness and equity. The doctrine of *eternal* misery cannot be satisfactorily reconciled with these convictions, hence it arises that although men *imagine* they believe it, partly from their having been accustomed from the cradle to read in the Bible, “everlasting fire,” “for ever,” &c. the false association

from the literal meaning of these English words, conflicting with their intuitive idea of Divine goodness and equity, prevents them embracing a *true* and *solid* conviction of the *certainty* of future punishment, and what is worse, so confuses their judgment, that they too readily fall into the fatal delusion that God will not punish at all. Again, the idea of *equity* is stamped in the minds of all men so indelibly that it alone has an unexceptionable authority over them. When children complain of their parents, servants of their masters, subjects of their princes, it is always done under the pretence that they are not equitable. Let us exemplify these remarks: Although men *profess* and *imagine* they believe in the doctrine of eternal torments, observe how they nullify its impression; *every one* is persuaded that he *himself* is not of the number of the wicked whose portion shall be “*everlasting fire* ;” in short, if they are not notoriously wicked, thieves, robbers, blasphemers, &c. they cannot conceive that God will condemn *them* to frightful and *endless* torments; they are sensible indeed they are guilty of some faults, but where is the man without sin? besides, they ask forgiveness daily, and cannot deserve misery *without end*; and what are the merits of Christ good for, if they do not deliver man from “*everlasting misery*?” Not only these persons flatter themselves with impunity, but even sinners of the deepest dye, all of them to a man, hope to escape hell, either by repenting as they propose to do sooner or later, or through the infinite mercy of God, that will get the better of justice, as they say; hence the more terrible hell becomes, by *supposing it eternal*, every one more easily persuades himself that Divine mercy will exempt him from it. Thus, every opinion proceeding from a *false* principle, destroys itself; nay, more, it produces a conclusion quite contrary to what was intended; and the opinion of the “*eternity*” of hell torments is more calculated to lull men to sleep than awaken them to their duty, and it is not presumptuous nor contrary to fact to believe that it materially checks the germ of true piety, which may be springing up in the mind of enquiring Christians; and what is still worse, in some instances, the *eternity* of it has “*scare*” men into absolute *Deism*.

LETTER II.

DEAR SIR,

THE next paragraph for our enquiry reads thus—

“We may assume that all admit that the happiness of the righteous will be eternal. To be consistent in their doubts and objections, men who question the *eternity* of future punishment, should also question that of future happiness; the two are spoken of in language so precisely the same, that nothing can be proved in regard of the duration of the one, without being equally proved in regard of that of the other. But men have no interest in abridging the period of reward, and therefore we never hear a doubt thrown upon the statement that future happiness will be everlasting.”

However specious this parallel may seem, it will not answer the purpose driven at; it has no point, although it cuts both ways; the subjects being perfect opposites, the premises are incompatible and the inference fallacious, and if it prove any thing, it proves infinitely too much; for if we are obliged to conclude that the ^{duration} ~~eternity~~ of misery* and the eternity of happiness are of equal extent and continuance, *because* “the two are spoken of in language so precisely the same, that nothing can be proved in regard to the duration of the one without being *equally* proved in regard of that of the other,” then it *necessarily* follows that the *evil and the misery* connected therewith must have been from all *eternity*, and either without any beginning at all, or must at least have an endless root in God, and consequently be God, for this latter is the case with happiness, for although man’s participation of happiness may commence here in time, yet the glorious kingdom of God itself is without any beginning, and existed in and with God from all inconceivable eternity.

Again, If the duration of evil and misery, is in *every respect* to answer to the eternity of glory and happiness, then the

* The term “misery” is not used in the passage, but it must be inferred.

duration of evil must be *backward* as well as *forwards*, and consequently has been from all inconceivable eternity, the holding of which is the heresy of the ancient *Manichæes*. Should it be replied, that the equality of these two *eternities*,* of the evil and the good, is not backward but forward, that is, although the evil, to wit, sin and the punishment connected therewith, was not without beginning, as happiness considered in itself and according to its nature was, yet that the duration of the misery is without end, and forwards of the same duration with the eternity of happiness, it is evident that if the extension is not the same as well backwards as forwards, the parallel is worthless, and if we are obliged, to avoid falling into heresy to shorten its duration one way, where is the inconsistency that we should, for good and weighty reasons, do so another way? And the rule of interpretation authorised by every other example is, that the duration of the subject *is not to be predicated by the terms, but the extent of the term itself is to be ascertained from the nature of the subject*. We will admit, that *sometimes* duration as applied to both conditions, is spoken of in language the same, and we will go farther and say, that the happiness of the saints in the kingdom of Christ is *limited, and will come to an end*, according to the intimation of St. Paul—"Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power, for he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death, for he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, All things are put under him, it is manifest, that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself, be subject unto him that put all things under him, *that God may be all in all*."—1 Cor. xv. 24—28.

* *Two eternities* is a contradiction in terms; we admit them to shew the consequences.

But does it follow that *future happiness* will come to an end? by no means, for the passage significantly proves that the dispensation of the gospel kingdom issues into a *more glorious one*, that of God the Father. But the two are *not* always “spoken of in language so precisely the same, that nothing can be proved in regard of the duration of the one without being equally proved in regard of that of the other.” Read the following scripture. St. Paul informs the Romans, that “If children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we also may be glorified together.” Again, he tells the Colossians, “when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” And our Lord in the interesting chapter, xiv. John, when comforting his disciples with the hope of heaven, said unto them, “Because I live, ye shall live also.” We shall do well to observe with attention the terms and expressions used by our Lord, when pointing out to his disciples the future condition both of the righteous and the wicked, in the parable of the tares of the field. “His disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world;* and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be at the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth, as the Sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Matt. xiii. 36—43. And at the 47th verse—“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every

* The original word, here rendered “world,” is the same as in other places is translated “everlasting,” &c.

kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world; the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Jesus said unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord." We have no appendages expressing "*eternity*" in these parables by our Lord, and with such an example, we think it would be wise for Divines, when descanting upon future punishment, *not to meddle with its eternity*. And if we further attend to the expressions employed by our Lord, we shall perceive an important discrepancy in his mode of stating the rewards of the righteous, and the punishment of the wicked. It is not anywhere said of the wicked, that they shall go into *eternal life*,—an *endless life of misery*, which is the language preferred by our hypothetic reasoners, and would be the most pertinent if their system were true; nor is there a single passage in which it is declared in a manner equally explicit, that the wicked shall rise again into a *life and immortality of absolute misery*. It remains for those who believe that such will be their destination to explain the cause of a distinction universally observed, or why does the revelation of God always avoid those expressions, which they always prefer?

And have we no other foundation upon which to ground the eternity of future happiness than the construction of language,—the arrangement of arbitrary symbols,—the forms of human speech? What, if all language were obliterated, could such a catastrophe in any way affect the duration and certainty of the happiness of the righteous, whose source and centre of felicity emanates from, and rests in, the communicable and immutable perfections of God? Flimsy, indeed, would be the hope of the good man,—yea, thinner than a cobweb,—did his future condition require to be certified by the English translation of an *ambiguous word*! But, adds the preacher, "men have no interest in abridging the period of reward, and therefore we

never hear a doubt thrown upon the statement that future happiness will be everlasting." And certainly we never ought, from any one who reflects a moment and can read his Bible. What, then, can we think or say of the preacher, who, by bad reasoning and false analogy of subjects, in placing opposites—good and bad—the saint as the sinner, and inferring co-enduring consequences, has, given occasion, for such doubts? All we will say is, *that he did not mean to do so*; and we have yet to learn what "interest" can be served by stretching the punishment of the other beyond the declarations of Jesus Christ. We next read—

"The only thing debated is, whether future misery will be everlasting; and this therefore we take as the single point on which there may exist difference of opinion, the single question to which we are to seek a satisfactory answer. And having thus narrowed and defined the subject of discussion, we may simply state to you the course we shall pursue, in order to determine and establish the truth. We shall examine, in the first place, what is the fair and candid interpretation of the statements of Scripture. We shall then, in the second place, endeavour to show that this interpretation is not at variance either with the *scheme of redemption*, or with the *known attributes of our God*."

From the foregoing intimation, and at this stage of our inquiry, I deem it needful to introduce a digression, previous to entering upon an investigation of *what is*, or *what is not*, a true interpretation of the statements of Scripture. We will suppose a Traveller, a sincere and earnest enquirer after truth, but one whose mind is verging into Deism, thrown into a mixed company of Christian professors. He is asked, how did the Christian religion appear unworthy of your choice? But where shall I find it? replies the stranger. What a question, says an *Abbot*; doth not the Catholic Apostolic Roman Church bear all the marks of it? Hold, sir, cries a Protestant; those marks belonged to the *Reformed Religion*, it is *entirely* founded on the Holy Scripture. What heresy, rejoins the *Abbot*; it seems to favor you only as you wrest it to serve your turn. Another Professor present asked the stranger whether he admitted the testimony of Scrip-

ture. What is the Scripture? asks our Traveller; what sort of a language does it speak? One party assures me it says "*white*," where others maintain it says "*black*;" which of them must I believe? * At this point of the discussion the Professors were not a little embarrassed, and it was enquired what method was to be taken for converting persons of this class; one was for beginning with proving the *divinity* of the Scripture. Very well, replies another, when that is performed, shall we have made much progress in the work? the difficulty will still be, to determine the *sense of it*. If this is not done, the Deist will reason thus: I grant, says he, that the Scripture is divine, that consequently it has some *divine sense*; have you found this sense? If you have, it ought to *reconcile and unite you*. If you have not, what use can you make of the *divinity* of a book, while you are ignorant of the *sense* of it? Some of the company flew into a passion at this discourse, and after a pretty long dispute, they parted with mutual dissatisfaction. It is not the doubting of the divinity of the Scripture that divides Christian societies; all unanimously acknowledge this. *The opposite senses*, which they *imagine* they find in it, is the only source of their contests, and these opposite senses are what serve the Deists as a pretence for rejecting all use of the Scripture itself.

I dare not enter into the detail of the contradictions which are found among professing Christians, not only the division which separates them into so many opposite bodies, but the division of each society within itself into parties, which it is impossible to reconcile; the facts are sufficiently notorious, and to say the least, is a lamentable instance of the frailty and obliquity of the human mind. Such are some of the evils surrounding us in the religious world, and, I fear, are too deeply

* This is the common language of the Deists; the contradiction which they find between the different opinions among Christians emboldens them to declare against Scripture. They do not distinguish that the Scripture is not the *cause* of such contradictions; it is only made the *occasion*.

rooted in attachment to forms and ceremonies,—in fondness for creeds and systems of divinity,—in strong prejudice for preconceived notions,—in contracted habits of thinking,—*in indolence for enquiry*,—but, above all, in a want of charity, and are too firmly seated to hope for any considerable mitigation. It is more difficult to awaken the sleepy part of mankind, than to convince the ignorant; when the eyelids are closed, all visible impressions are precluded; when they are opened, the mind cannot but perceive and distinguish. In like manner, when prejudice (which often keeps the door of the intellect) is removed, perception and judgment do their offices honestly, and knowledge and truth gain an admittance. Hence, these differences point out the necessity for some *axioms*, some *plain incontestable principles and rules* for the interpretation and understanding of Scripture, which abounds with numerous *figurative, allegorical, equivocal, and even contradictory expressions*, so that we must judge of their *true sense*, not by what the words may seem to import, but by those *eternal and unchangeable truths* which can never vary,—THE KNOWN ATTRIBUTES OF GOD; which are the basis and essence of all religion; such are the *spirituality, eternity, omnipotence* of God. These are undoubted and fundamental truths, whether known by the written word, or by internal testimony stamped on the consciences of all men; secondary truths are such as we know only by scripture testimony, and perfectly connected with the former, such as the *sanctity, the justice* (equity,) the *wisdom*, and the *mercy of God*, and the *unity* of these is the consolidation of *eternal and infinite perfection*.

Let us seek for some illustration of these premises; mankind are agreed that the ideas of goodness and justice are inseparably connected with the idea of God, but our custom of setting those attributes in opposition to each other, is a proof that we are strangers to their nature. We have heard it said, that justice gives way to goodness, or goodness gives place to justice, but the knowledge of the *unity of God* should make this false

notion fall to the ground, and satisfy us that the *distinctions we make* between the Divine attributes proceed from the narrow limits of our understanding, which is obliged to consider the different parts of a whole successively. What we know with certainty concerning the *spirituality* of God prevents us from taking literally, which is said of his *eyes, hands, nostrils, &c.* In like manner, what we know concerning his *sanctity*, prevents our understanding, in a *literal sense*, those expressions which seem to ascribe to him the passions of *wrath, jealousy, fury, and partiality*. This rule is applicable to a thousand places in Scripture, and would clear up many difficulties, and prevent many disputes, if rightly applied. God is *wise, just, and good*; no one of his attributes destroys another. Justice is not opposed to goodness, nor goodness to justice; they are so inseparable that we cannot so much as think a man to be just unless he is good, or good unless he is just. In God, goodness and justice are boundless: by his goodness, he offers his creatures all the treasures of his bliss; by his justice, he fills with the same treasures those who accept of them, and leaves those who refuse them destitute of them. *Divine justice* is, therefore, widely different from the idea commonly formed of it. It is represented under the notions of *vengeance, hatred, wrath, and fury*; and therefore goodness and mercy are often set in opposition to it, to prevent, as it were, the effects of its rigid severity; but this is *humanizing* the Deity, for were Divine justice of such a nature, God must cease to be just when he exercises his goodness, or good and merciful when he employs his justice, since it is evident that goodness and wrath, mercy and revenge, can never subsist together. Let us note well the following extract, from Chevalier Ramsay's work on "Natural and Revealed Religion." He says—"The Divine nature cannot be unappeasable for the following reasons: 1st. Wise and good legislators have no vindictive wrath nor implacable aversion to the most execrable malefactors; *they hate the crime without hating the criminal*; they punish only to prevent the one, or correct the other. If the torments of the damned be *eternal*, God can have none of these

two views: instead of correcting damned spirits, his punishments serve only to confirm them in their vicious habits and hatred of God; instead of putting an end to their crimes, eternal pains will but augment despair, rage, aversion to God, and blasphemy. 2ndly. If the Divine Nature was unappeasable, wherein could his goodness consist? How could his mercy be said 'to prevail over all his works'? All grant, and the Scripture says expressly, that the number of the elect is small, yea very small, in comparison to the number of the damned; now wherein does the mercy of God appear, if the most part of fallen spirits be eternally miserable? This is infinitely more absurd than if we should say that a king is a good, humane, and merciful prince, because he rescues four or five criminals, while he condemns thousands, yea innumerable millions, of his subjects to racks, slow tortures, and languishing pains. This, however, would be much less cruel than the conduct of God, if he continues his punishments eternally. 3rdly. This doctrine of God's being unappeasable, destroys at once all our ideas of his most perfect distributive justice. There is no attribute of which men have falser ideas than of Divine justice; they fancy that it is an attribute of God, which obliges him by necessity of nature to torment for ever and pursue with implacable vengeance beings that are criminal. This is again humanizing the Godhead. Justice is that perfection in God, by which he endeavours continually to make all intelligencies just, as goodness is that attribute in God by which he endeavours to make them all happy. Now these two perfections are one and the same in the Infinite Being, though their effects be different according to the nature of the subject upon which he exerts them. We have already demonstrated that all the communicable perfections of the Godhead are reducible to three, POWER, WISDOM, and GOODNESS. Now, since all the active attributes of the Godhead, power, life, and force, are the same; and since all his intellectual attributes, wisdom, light, and truth, are the same; it follows, by the rules of analogy, that all his moral attributes, *goodness, love, and justice*, are the same. God punishes, therefore, only to purify;

he chastizes only in order to reclaim; he wounds by physical evil, that he may cure moral evil; he shews his essential love of justice and holiness, by doing all he can to destroy what is contrary to these attributes. Supposing, however, that these perfections were distinct in their cause as in their effects, yet, since all the Divine attributes act in, with, and by each other, they can never be separated; they are *never incompatible*, and therefore God's justice is always accompanied with goodness and love; his punishments must be cures, and his most terrible judgments remedies. 4thly. It is true that God is represented in Scripture as vindictive and revengeful, as he to whom vengeance belongs; as a consuming fire; as punishing with fury, anger, and hatred. But unless we suppose that his perfections are incompatible and mutually destructive of each other, we must allow that all these expressions signify only, that God is an irreconcilable enemy to vice, that there can never be any alliance betwixt holiness and sin, purity and corruption, order and disorder; not that he ceases to be eternal love and essential goodness. Though he *hates the crime*, yet he *loves the criminal*. Vindictive justice, therefore, is that attribute in God by which he pursues vice with all sorts of torments, 'till it be totally extirpated, destroyed, and annihilated; yea, this avenging wrath is an emanation and a necessary branch of God's distributive justice, which is that attribute in God by which he proportions the rewards and punishments, the happiness and misery of all his creatures, to their dispositions of fidelity or infidelity, to the degrees of their co-operation or resistance. Distributive or vindictive justice consists, then, in this most exact equity, in this admirable proportion, and not in that cruel enmity and aversion, by which God is represented as *hating the criminal for ever*, and defeating for ever the design he had in creating, ceasing to be essential goodness and love, neglecting to destroy injustice, and voluntarily leaving fallen beings in a state of rebellion, unholiness, and injustice. According to this inhuman doctrine of the schoolmen, God must either be impotent, so that he cannot convert the creature; or must love eternal

disorder, since he will not employ almighty power to destroy it. In both these senses the doctrine of *Eternal Punishments* is a disguised Manicheism, and supposes that the evil principle is co-eternal with God, since it is indestructible."

The above remarks are so pertinent to our enquiry that no apology is needed for their insertion. These views of the Deity are founded on bare good sense, and the testimony of conscience on the nature of justice, which ideas all of us find more or less engraved in our minds, and must necessarily be the work of our Divine Creator; and from this source we gather the idea of those truths which are eternal and immutable, viz., God's wisdom, equity, and goodness, and to those he himself directs us to determine between him and ourselves concerning the justice of his conduct towards us; Isaiah v. 3—"Judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard." And again, Ezek. xviii. 29—"O house of Israel, are not my ways equal?" which words suppose that the *rule* to which God sends us to measure whether his ways are right, is right in itself, being the workmanship of his own hands.

I will give an instance of what appears to me the consequences of gross inattention and neglect of our premises. Let a neutral person hear two of the most able divines dispute, one a *Calvinist*, the other an *Arminian*; the more justly they reason, the more embarrassed he will be; he will find that each of them impeaches some one of the Divine attributes, and they charge each other with that bold attempt; and they have both grounds for so doing. Volumes upon volumes have been written, and centuries have rolled over this dispute without coming to an agreement, and so long as they build on the same principle, they never can. What is this principle—is it simple, evident, and incontestable? Very far from it. It is a bare supposition founded on words and expressions, susceptible of different senses, and the *choice each has made of one sense*, preferable to another, is what serves as a basis to these controversies. Ought then these differences to surprise us? What does astonish me is, that men, generally, do not discover the

false of a principle, the consequences of which are necessarily conflicting. Build on a simple, evident, and incontestable basis, and the consequences will be entirely uniform; build on a false principle, the justest arguments will prove the most irreconcilable contradictions. If I do really know the Scripture to be divine by the *Divine characteristics*, I shall consider only what relates to those characteristics as evident truths; when it seems to speak a contrary language, I shall take it for granted that the *certain* cannot be shaken by the *uncertain*—that ambiguous expressions cannot obscure evidence; and without giving myself any concern for determining the meaning of such expressions, it will be sufficient for me to know what they *do not signify*. I will make use of the same rule in all manner of subjects in proportion as they have more or less evidence, and content myself with seeing those things in the *general*, whose particularities I cannot discover; and resolve to be ignorant of that which seems to me impenetrable, and attend less to the detail and circumstances than to the substance and principle of things, and without being surprised at seeming contradictions, which certainly lie only in the terms and expressions, fix my eyes on the *general design*, which never varies. Do not the divisions among professing Christians arise from their having taken the contrary method? Had they been content with an evidence of this kind, how many bitter controversies and disputes would have been avoided; for, in short, they are all grounded on expressions, on men's pretending to determine in what sense God hath said such or such a thing. It is natural that the rule by which I know the Scriptures to be divine, should be the same which serves to give me the meaning of it. I know the Scriptures to be divine by divine characteristics, therefore I will not ascribe to it any sense *contrary* to those divine characteristics. Let us give some examples. The Scripture says, "God wills not that any one should perish, but that all should come to repentance." It also says, "God hardens whom he will harden." "It is impossible that those who have been illuminated should be renewed by repentance." Here are two contradictory propo-

sitions. I ask, which of them bears a Divine character? Again, "The Lord revengeth, and is furious."—Nahum i. 2. It elsewhere says, "Fury is not in me."—Isa. xxvii. 4. Which of these two propositions, taken literally, bears a Divine character? Do you ask, What then can these contradictory propositions signify? I answer, it is enough for me to know what they *do not* signify. Again, Jesus Christ said, "This is my body." Here, then, is made out transubstantiation! He said, "Thou art Peter, and on this rock," &c. Therefore, the Pope is head of the Church! The Scripture says, "That God makes some vessels to honour, and others to dishonour." Here, then, are made out absolute election and reprobation! It says, "There is no name but that of Jesus Christ by which men can be saved." Therefore all Pagans, Jews, Mahometans, are damned, and damned eternally, for it is also said, "That the fire of hell shall not be quenched"!

The generality of Christians, who maintain the eternity of hell torments, have taken some particular *expressions* for *the rule of the true*, such as "everlasting fire," "the worm that dieth not," &c. and these expressions have been allowed the preference to the most simple intuitive ideas, not only of Infinite Goodness, but even to that of Sovereign Justice. Tell them that the idea of justice and that of equity are but one and the same,—that equity requires a perfect equality, an exact proportion between the crime and the punishment, and make them observe that an infinity of creatures are culpable in *some* degree, such as wild, heathen, barbarous nations, &c. and cannot have deserved *eternal* punishment. No matter, here the curtain must be drawn, the *expression* of "everlasting fire" is positive, and we ought to adore the Divine justice in its judgments, and not pretend to be wiser than God. Have not many Christians excluded Pagans, Jews, &c. from salvation on this declaration, "There is no other name given unto men whereby they may be saved"? and made the most simple ideas of universal goodness and of sovereign equity (which will render to every man according to his deeds, and judge every creature by the use or abuse

of his knowledge) have they not, I say, made them give way to *words* and *expressions*? What are we to think of the contradiction between these two ways of speaking? Which ought we to consider as the *true*, that by which men unanimously and without hesitation assent to the same axioms, or that by which they prove inconsistent with themselves, for no other reason but the support of their own systems, and without any other demonstration than that equivocal maxim, we must lay our hand on our mouth and not attempt to penetrate into the secret will of God? and this maxim, taken in a wrong sense, gives those who make it, room to settle down, and confirms them in the *false*. We admit that it is much more easy to perceive the false application made of ^{the rule} *A*, than exactly distinguish the true use of it. This is the nice and difficult point. Let us bring to mind the clear, simple maxims on which we presume all are agreed, when not on their guard for some favorite opinion. 1st. That the Deity, being self-sufficient, could have no end in establishing religion than the interest of his creatures. 2ndly. That, being pure goodness, he can will only the happiness of his creatures. 3rdly. That, being sovereign equity, and consequently impartial, he cannot will the happiness of some and the misery of others. Lastly, That if he calls them all to happiness on certain conditions, he must provide all with means and opportunity to perform them. Let us now put two propositions.

God is holy, just, and good, but future punishment is *eternal misery*!

God is holy, just, and good, therefore future punishment is *corrective*, and its *end eternal happiness*.

I ask which of these bears a Divine character?

The foregoing maxims are grounded on the idea we conceive of the Divine goodness and equity. Shall we draw the curtain over these? Must we cry out, "O, the depth;" and add, it is not our business to judge of the equity of God? Are we sensible of what would be the consequence of all this? There would then be *nothing certain*, either in religion or civil society. If men do not find the rule of the Just within themselves, they

will never be able to agree on anything ; they will have no *fixed principle* to build on, and this being supposed, the laws, which are essentially founded on the same idea, would lose their force, and what a chaos of strange consequences would be the result.

LETTER III.

DEAR SIR,

WE will again return to our enquiry, and once more take up the thread of the sermon, which we now hope to do with some advantage, The preacher says to his audience—

“Now you are of course perfectly aware that the terms in which the Bible speaks of future punishment are such, *according to our translation*, as make out this punishment to be ‘everlasting.’”

That our *translators* have denounced future punishment to be everlasting, for ever, &c. is evident, and such translation is too indiscriminately received as literally the words of God. But to this we demur, and affirm, first, That the original terms do not *necessarily imply eternity* in its literal sense; this is indisputably well known to all scholars,* and we presume the preacher is not ignorant of it from the guarded manner of the sentence. It is the perplexing variety in our translation of the original word “*æion*,” and “*æonian*,”† and the want of discernment in readers, which have been a principal mean in propagating the opinion of *endless* torments,—That God will kindle a fire, and so constantly supply it with combustible matter, brimstone, &c. by his all creating power, as to endure as long as he himself shall exist, and that the subjects of future

* Vide Rev. T. Broughton, (formerly Prebendary of Sarum,) his dissertations on Futurity, iv. dissert. sec. viii. See also Dr. Hammond on Matt. xxiv. 3; xxviii. 20; Luke i. 70; Rom. ix. 5; I Tim. i. 17.

† The word “*æion*,” as a substantive, occurs 128 times in the Greek Testament, and in our translation is rendered 72 times *ever*, twice *eternal*, 36 times *world*, 7 times *never*, 3 times *evermore*, twice *worlds*, twice *ages*, once *course*, once *world without end*, and twice it is passed over. The word “*æonian*,” as an adjective, occurs 71 times, is once rendered *ever*, 42 times *eternal*, 3 times *world*, and 25 times *everlasting*. (Vide N. Scarlett’s translation of the New Testament.)

punishment being raised incorruptible and indissoluble, shall for the same period endure burning in the lake of fire, God having no ultimate end in view, *but as an example, they say*, “for the sake of the general good !” You will excuse this plain statement, and understand by this time the drift of what we have advanced, and I now ask upon what bottom the preacher has grounded the doctrine of “*interminable misery ?*” why, purely upon some equivocal and metaphorical expressions, to which we have referred, and it is indisputably proved, that these original words do not *necessarily* indicate eternity proper. This is evident from their various renderings and application ; and how is it possible that *words* which sometimes mean one thing, and sometimes another, can *prove* anything ?

And we affirm, secondly, that those English expressions, *as thus annexed*, do not determine and establish the truth of this opinion, and willingly leave it to the preacher’s own shewing. We read—

“The wicked are spoken of as ‘going away into everlasting punishment ;’ their sentence is, ‘Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.’ And in the book of the Revelation, we read that, ‘the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever.’ But are not the words ‘eternal,’ ‘everlasting,’ ‘for ever,’ sometimes used in the Bible of periods which were to come to an end ? *They are.* We read of ‘the everlasting hills,’ though elsewhere we are told that ‘the earth shall be dissolved’ and ‘pass away.’ We read that God gave the land of Canaan to Abraham and his seed ‘for an everlasting possession,’ and yet we know that the Jews possessed the inheritance but a little while. Among the laws given in the book of Exodus, with respect to servants, we find, that if a servant did not choose to be freed at the end of seven years, his master was to perform certain ceremonies, and the servant was to serve him for ever ; here ‘for ever’ is undoubtedly used of a very limited period—of the remainder of the slave’s life, or of the time which was to elapse before the jubilee commenced. But in all such cases there is no danger of our being led into any mistake ; by the use of the term there is always proof at hand, that the use is metaphorical denoting some long time, *but not an endless.* Try it for yourselves.

Take any case in which the Bible speaks of something as eternal, which you can prove not to be eternal; and see whether it be not in its own nature temporary, or affirm to be temporary in other parts of the Bible, and whether, therefore, there is not full security against your being led into error by the use of the word.”*

The construction of the above passage is extremely bad and most unfortunate, for although it is very true our *English Bible* speaks of many things “*as eternal*” which can be proved “*not to be eternal*,” yet for us to admit that *Scripture* speaks of something as eternal, which is not so, is too gross an assumption to be intended; and here, again, we are forcibly reminded of the conference with the Traveller and the Christian Professors, and the necessity and importance of applying the premises noticed in the digression, which must not be lost sight of in our enquiry, and to which I claim your attention, for we ought not (swallow like) to skim over the surface of things in searching for truth; when we expect to find diamonds, we must dig deep. The next paragraph is bold and challenging, and I hope you will tolerate my taking up the gauntlet, and if I wear upon your patience my excuse is, the contents of the sermon and the cause of truth seem to demand it. We next read—

“But this is not the case with future punishment. The word ‘eternal’ is distinctly and repeatedly used, but we challenge you to find any thing in other parts of Scripture, which shall prove that the word is only metaphorically used; and we *equally challenge you to find any thing in the nature of the case*, to prove that it cannot be literally used. And the Bible† is not content with affirming that hell shall be everlasting, and thus using the word which it elsewhere uses in a limited and metaphorical sense; it speaks in our text of ‘the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched.’ Surely if there is to be a deathless worm and an unquenchable fire, the eternity of the punishment is distinctly alleged;

* For the use and abuse of words consult “Lock on the Understanding.” B. III.

† Read “our *Translators* are not content,” &c.

and that too, in language, of whose use in reference to any finite duration *you cannot produce a single instance from Scripture.*"

In denial of this, see our notes and references on the text. We deem our preceding observations more than ample for the above. I have only one remark to offer here. As we advance more fully in our enquiry, I think we shall be able to prove a something (if not already done) "in the nature of the case," that no *mere words or expressions can reconcile*, "either with the scheme of redemption or with the known attributes of (our) God." And here ends the strife *about words*, which I am heartily tired of.

LETTER IV.

DEAR SIR,

Our next paragraph will be of some length. It is a little confused, but it proves to demonstration, first, That the preacher possesses talents, and the gift of declamation in no common degree ; secondly, That *hypothetical* matter was much more at hand than argument. How much beyond this the reader must be the judge, and he will excuse the dogmatism which prevails. I shall have some observations to submit on the case of Judas, on which great stress is laid. The preacher says—

“There is one saying of our Lord which has always seemed to me *conclusive of the fact*, that the Bible must be literally interpreted when it speaks of ‘everlasting punishment ;’ it is that saying which had reference to Judas the traitor—‘It had been good for that man if he had never been born.’ *Creation is a blessing, if wretchedness stops short of being immortal.* Let the man wear away millions upon millions of ages in the prison house of woe ; heap upon him torment upon torment, and let there be no abatement, nay, rather an increase of misery as century crowds upon century, till imagination is wearied in telling up the period ; still if there is ever to break upon him a moment of deliverance, we affirm it to have been good for him that he had been born. He may often have cursed the day of his birth, as he tossed to and fro, and could gain no rest in the torment of his condition ; he may often have cried bitterly, though vainly, for the blessing of annihilation, desiring in the desperateness of his agony the extinction of his being, that he might reach the termination of his sufferings. But if he exhaust the penalties which are the retribution of crimes done on the earth, if the worm and the fire wear out the long reckoning, and leave him having nothing more to pay, there is yet spreading before him a period of rest, and even of happiness, compared with which the ages of his anguish are nothing but a point, and his own feeling must be to forget all the past and bound with exultation in the prospect of the future. Can he subscribe to the saying, that

‘it would have been good for him not to have been born,’ seeing that at whatever point his sufferings terminated, there would remain an immeasurably longer period for happiness than had been consumed in his agony? Must he not feel, that the boon of existence demands from him the most glowing gratitude, and if there were an exclamation wrung from him in his wretchedness, which he now wishes to retract, and over which he mourns, must it not be that which execrated the moment when he rose into life and panted with the desire of being reduced into nothingness? No, no; there lives not, there cannot live, the man of whom it can be said, ‘It had been *better* for him not to have been born,’ if hell be but a temporary place—if those tremendous gates, which close on lost souls, are ever to fly open, that the victims of wrath may go free. I care not what may have been the man’s misdoings and sufferings whilst dwelling upon earth; let his life have been uncheered (if ever there were such an one) by a solitary smile—one black and biting calamity—and then let him have gone down an accursed thing to the pit of despair, and let a period which we can scarcely compass have been spent in the penal fires of a fierce retribution, and yet, if the close of this appalling tale is to be, that the wretched being is emancipated, his crimes purged away, his vast debt cancelled—then I am certain, from the known principles of our nature, that as he beheld an eternity of peace opening brightly before him, *his first impulse* would be to join in the words of our general thanksgiving—‘*We bless Thee for our creation.*’ It is therefore telling me that hell will never terminate to tell me of any one of its inmates, that ‘it had been good for him if he had not been born.’ And adding this to other reasons, for holding the literal interpretation of Scripture, we may contend that we have a strong case in support of the position, that future punishment will be without end;* *we may at least declare, that there is nothing in other parts of the Bible* to warrant us in supposing, that our text speaks only of a finite period, when it declares of the wicked that ‘their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.’ But we have allowed that things are spoken of in Scripture in general as ‘eternal,’

* I wish I could “scare” this good man’s opinion from his mind, with such powers of description which tell more for the *true* than for the *false* opinion.

in regard of which we know, from the nature of the case or other considerations, that the expression is not to be taken literally. May not this apply in the instance under review? May not the doctrine of the eternity of punishment involve an impossibility, or be opposed to other and undisputed doctrines? and, if so, may we not conclude, that the words ‘everlasting’ and ‘for ever’ should be understood of a long period, but not of an endless? *Yes, if this were so.* But this we deny; and we are now about to cut away this ground of hope, by proving the doctrine of the eternity of punishment at variance neither with the scheme of redemption nor with the known attributes of our God.”

As so much stress is laid on the case of Judas as establishing the opinion of *eternal* misery, we will give it some attention, and I must beg to insert the passage referred to in full, from Matt. xxvi. 24. “The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! *It had been good* for that man if he had not been born.” The parallel one in Mark xiv. 21, reads a little different. “The Son of man indeed goeth as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! *good were it* for that man if he had never been born.” You will observe the preacher in the strain of his eloquent and flowing language uses the comparative “*better*,” for which I can find no authority. The argument (if any can be deduced) is purely hypothetical, for there is nothing in the passages to prove *endless* torments. St. Peter tells us that “Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to *his own place*; but this is not thought sufficiently explicit, and most men will have it that Judas must be punished with *eternal* misery. I am content with the simple declaration of the Apostle. Some commentators contend that the words were said prophetically as a warning, and should not be translated “*for him*,” but “*to him*, (in his own apprehension) it were good he had not been born.” Others, more generally, consider it a Jewish hyperbole—a proverbial expression; the phrase is often used proverbially both by sacred and profane authors, and is often found in the Talmudical writers, (see Wolfin’s and Lightfoot’s note on the pass. ; also

Grotius in loco.) Far stronger expressions are used by Job (iii. 1—16) and by Jeremiah (xx. 14—18), and if both these good men could use such awful expressions and wishes while under temporal affliction and distress, why might not our Lord, according to the idiom of the Jewish scripture, thus speak of the traitor who was on the point of betraying him, whose crime was of the deepest dye, and whose punishment must be proportionably great? And are we in this case so to consider these expressions in order that we should make of them *a doctrine*, and what may be called “*an article of faith*,” in order to inform us, without the least ambiguity, what will be the final state of millions? I trow not. After all, though we cannot explain the sense meant by our Saviour, (and it would be ridiculous to ground our reasoning on a thing we do not comprehend) what follows? That the *certain* cannot be shaken by the *uncertain*,—that an obscure proposition in a particular case can never be allowed good evidence against plain, universal, incontestable axioms, as noticed in our premises in the digression.

But these words of our Lord, even in their literal sense, imply no more than that it had been good for that man had he died in his mother's womb,—that he had proved an “untimely birth,”—that he had been carried from the womb to the grave,—that he had never seen the light,—had never been duly born, for Solomon says that such go to the *same place* with the man of longest life,—Eccles. vi. 3—6. If Judas had died in his mother's womb, he would have had all the advantages of the covenant of grace as a son of *Adam*, and not have been the betrayer of his Lord and Redeemer, and so would have escaped the awful consequences of his treachery. That the passages do not imply, Good were it had he *not existed*,—*not been created*, is most evident, for we cannot suppose that our Lord could have thrown out an imputation on his own acts, for “all things were created *by him* and for him,”—Col. i. 16; and I think the distinction pointed out natural and conclusive. The preacher says—“Creation is a blessing, *if* wretchedness stops short of being immortal”! This sounds oddly—immortal wretched-

ness ! Misery, wretchedness, and woe, are more negative than *positive*, and are always associated with negative qualities, as *corruption, perishing, destruction, perdition, and death*. I really am sorry to break in upon this beautifully descriptive harangue, but as we are dealing with things rather than *words*, I must be pardoned in varying this sentence, and ask it to be shewn, *How creation is a blessing, if it ends in eternal misery ?* Should any one undertake to prove this, we will thank him for his statement. We admire the preacher's powers in running out the detail and agony of future punishment, and perhaps he has not exceeded in the case in question, although that punishment be not endless, and can such be called "temporary ?" What we contend for is, that future punishment is a dispensation of chastisement—a mean ; and the *end of creation, eternal happiness*. Then, indeed, not this one man merely, but myriads, yea *all created intelligencies*, can join in the words of our general thanksgiving, "We bless Thee for our creation." Reverse this idea, and take the opinion of *endless* torments to be true, then, I say, there lives not one man, but innumerable beings, of whom it may emphatically be said, *It had been better for them not to have existed !—NOT CREATED !* But this ~~idea~~ is so mon-^{Transition}strous,—the difficulty so strong,—that it destroys itself ; it proves infinitely too much ; it would overthrow all religion, whereof the idea of God ought to be the basis ; it would give the lie to the voice of universal nature, of conscience, and common sense itself, all which unanimously conspire to bear witness to *infinite goodness* ; and this same voice of common sense does likewise teach us, that the ideas we have of perfect goodness are not in the least our own works, but must have *superior cause and origin*, and since man is not the cause and origin, they must proceed from the Author of his being. I, therefore, ask, whether it be reasonable to *suspect* such traces imprinted in us by his own hand in indelible characters, or to smother undoubted evidence to make room for palpable difficulties and contradictions, built upon metaphorical terms and expressions, which are at least equivocal, if not totally ambiguous ?

A difficulty advanced against so clear a principle as that of the Divine goodness falls to the ground of itself, and the stronger it appears to be, we may be assured it is built on a *false* principle. Now this difficulty depends entirely on the ETERNITY of hell torments; put the case that this supposition is groundless, the difficulty at once ceases.

The self-sufficiency of the Deity is infinitely complete and perfect in the adorable Trinity; hence creation is a free act of God, and intended to shew forth the divine nature in a finite degree by forming creatures after his own likeness; and he can create nothing but what he loves, for this action being free, he would not have exerted it if it had displeased him; and for the same reason it is, that God desires necessarily the happiness of all he creates, because it is impossible to love a being and not desire its well-being. Therefore eternal providence knows, wills, and employs continually all the means necessary to lead his intelligent creatures to their ultimate and supreme happiness. *Then*, that eternity which shall succeed time, will be essentially agreeable to the eternity which preceded it, nor will there be any difference than the existence of an infinite number of beings that did not exist in the former. But all those beings will be the images of the sovereignly happy Being. They will all partake of his bliss, in the degree and measure proportioned to their several capacities;—they will rejoice at having received a being, and perhaps even at *having experienced what pain is*;—they will admire perfect equity in the infinite proportion it has established among intelligent creatures, and the entire compensation of the *good and bad things of this life*, with those of the life to come. The idea of severity will no longer enter into that of justice, and wisdom having answered the designs of infinite goodness *in restoring all things to order*, God will review the workmanship of his own hands as He did at the beginning, and pronounce it “VERY GOOD.”

We must express our surprise that no other citations from Scripture are brought forward in support of the opinion controverted than those equivocal terms and expressions already noticed, and I much doubt whether any others can be found.

LETTER V.

DEAR SIR,

I WISH we could narrow our subject of enquiry within a more moderate compass, but I imagine the number of pages will not give offence, provided they afford (as I hope they will) satisfaction in point of argument in favour of the truth. The enquiry has carried me far beyond anticipation, and had it not been for the boldness of the attack and the confidence assumed, I should not have troubled you with these letters. I hope you will not charge me with being dogmatical, but as our reasoning is from plain, simple, incontestable axioms, and not from mere *words* and *expressions*, we have ground for confidence. We now approach, if not the most interesting, certainly a most important branch of our enquiry,—“The scheme of redemption,” as connected with the opinion in question, and had our preacher favoured us with some scriptural and decided views on this vital subject, we should have been thankful. I can only discover one or two remarks about confounding the terms redemption with salvation, &c. We are then hurried on to its assumed adaptation with future punishment. As we had been told the *eternity* of future punishment “is not at variance with the scheme of redemption,” we naturally expected some elucidation as to its object and design. I, therefore, cannot say ‘content!’ We will however try to supply this *omission*, and shew *the design and result of the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ* from Scripture declarations, which are clear and positive on this point. Our Lord said unto Pilate, “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.” The truth!—what truth? What truth is that to which our Saviour says he came to bear witness? Why, to the truth of

our holy religion,—to religion truly such,—which is miserably obscured by some vain and impious opinions and pretensions to that name, but whose most glorious truth is, God's infinite mercy and compassion to a fallen world of sinners, “for the Son of man came to save that which was lost.” (Matt. xviii. 11.) Well, therefore, might the great Apostle call it “a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” Again, in his epistle to Timothy, after exhorting that prayer and supplication be made for all men, he adds, “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, (the original word means restored) and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (I Tim. ii. 3, 4.) This implies something more than a mere wish, a desire, it is a positive decree,—an efficacious will of God,—that all men shall be restored; and the means provided are equally certain,—*their coming to the knowledge of the truth*, and “we trust in the living God, who is the saviour (restorer) of all men, specially of those that believe.” (I Tim. iv. 10.) Here is declared, first, the election of all true believers to this special salvation; and, secondly, the general salvation—“*the great salvation*”—the ultimate restoration of all in some future dispensation, for “He gave his life a ransom for all, to be testified in due season.” (I Tim. ii. 6.) The Scriptures every where declare that Jesus Christ came to save (restore) all men, and this is repeated in almost every page of the New Testament, yet it is surprising that the expression of *all men*, a thousand times repeated in Scripture, should make so little impression on the minds of men; while those of *eternity*, *everlasting*, *for ever*, are received without restriction, though it is most evident they are used in a limited sense, and spoken of and applied to things long since ended. If this dogma of *eternal* torments were given up, what a flood of light would burst upon the devout and prayerful Christian in his meditation and study of divine truth.

The *result* of the glorious plan of redemption is clearly indicated by St. Paul, in the 5th chap. Romans, 12v. to the end, and if the effects of the offence were *universal*, what may we not

expect from the free gift which is to *exceed it*, as appears from those beautiful parallels of comparison of Adam's transgression and the super-abounding of grace through Christ, "by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation : *even so* by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." It is worse than trifling to say this only means that all men shall be raised into life at the resurrection, for what would follow if the free gift be limited to this ? Why, that myriads of our fellow creatures would be raised, and then doomed to **ETERNAL** torments !! Would not annihilation be an infinite mercy compared to such an issue ? Again I ask, does such an idea bear any marks of the Divine characteristics ? Once more, God, because of our Saviour's obedience, humiliation, and suffering, "hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, (the latin version is *infernum*, those that are in hell) ; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Phil. ii. 9—11.) Here the Apostle speaks of a rational confession,—an act of intelligent beings,—an universal genuflection, adoration, and confession. Now it is certain this could not be to the glory of God if it were to be made by beings that are to blaspheme with fiend-like rage for ever against the Most High. "He that committeth sin is of the devil ; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." (I. John iii. 8.) I ask, how are the works of the devil destroyed (which means to abolish, or take away, disannul), if sin and its consequences are perpetuated throughout all *eternity* ? *And who is the conqueror in such an issue, Jesus Christ or Satan ?* We have here made known unto us the positive and express purpose for which the Son of God appeared in a fallen world, and how can we have the hardihood to assume that Infinite Wisdom and Omnipotent Power shall not finally accomplish His will ? "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the *sin of the world*." (John i. 29.

Nothing is more opposite to Scripture and contrary to good sense, than to limit the clemency and mercy of God to the *span of this life*, which is only as the first hour of man's duration. Will another mode of existing place him out of the reach of the effects of a Goodness which is infinite and immutably the same ? Doth the separation of the soul from the body make it cease to be the *work of God*,—a work which he cannot forsake ? and the Psalmist informs us, “He will not always chide, neither will He keep his anger for ever.” (ciii. 9.)

But whither tends all the wonderful proceedings of *justice* and *mercy* ? To the accomplishment of that authentic declaration, “Every tongue shall give praise to God, and celebrate the goodness of the Lord, and his wondrous works towards the children of men.” Read the whole of the cvii. Ps. But enough. “I know not (says the learned Dr. Burnet) how the doctrine of *eternal torments* becomes so agreeable to certain severe and cruel divines, who will not even bear that this point should be examined ; the time will come when this opinion will be as absurd and ridiculous as transubstantiation.”

Having supplied an omission on the part of the preacher, I must confess it is utterly impossible for me to reconcile the above full and explicit declarations of Holy Writ with the doctrine in question. The reader will please adopt his own course. The next paragraph, I think, clearly illustrates a position we have noticed in the digression, namely, That when we attempt an argument, or to reason on a *false* principle, (the preacher is grounding his reasoning on the *eternity* of punishment) great confusion ensues, conflicting ideas, and false conclusions. A distinction is made between redemption (of which, he says, all are partakers) and salvation,—“that we have not the smallest right to suppose, or even to conjecture, that because all men have been redeemed, all will be finally saved” !—“that redemption furnishes a vast argument in support of eternal punishment” ! and much more to the same purport. Our inference is, that as Christ died for us, therefore we are redeemed ; Christ has redeemed us, therefore man must be restored ; and that the

wicked are condemned for a time, namely, from their redemption wrought, and its accomplishment. Their restitution ultimately effected, contradicts in no degree the doctrine of free grace, because these purposes shall be served in their condemnation by means of their pains and wretchedness ; and although the redemption of the wicked be finished and infallible in itself, yet that the application of such benefits to them individually may be and *is conditional as to the season and period of its being so applied* ; and although the final recovery of a fallen world must follow, from the single fact of the death of Jesus Christ, some period sooner or later, conditionally and accordingly as they shall co-operate with the Divine influence, yet awfully and bitterly will men reap the fruits of their own doings in resisting such influence. Frail and ignorant man does indeed contend with his Maker, but he must one day yield up the contest ; *finite* cannot frustrate the design and will of *infinite*. The Deity has not bestowed a gift, moral agency, which he cannot control ; free intelligencies may resist for a time, but God would not have an absolute empire over the heart, he would cease to be omnipotent ; if he could not at last subdue the most rebellious of his creatures without doing violence to their liberty, man must finally “ be willing in the day of God’s power.” But let us read on—

“ As to the scheme of redemption, we believe that many now confound redemption and salvation, as though they meant the same thing, or differed only in some unimportant particular. But redemption, of which all are partakers* (seeing that Christ gave himself ‘ a ransom for all’), only puts men into a salvable state, or

* What jumbling it is to say that all men are partakers of redemption, and at the same time to assume that 99 out of a 100 will remain *eternally* lost ; it is a play upon words and nonsense ;—*limited* salvation procured by an *infinite* atonement is a palpable inconsistency. Why do not divines revise the few, the very few, metaphorical expressions on which they have based the horrid dogma of eternal misery, and let their zeal for the Redeemer, united with the feelings of Christians, induce them to *adopt* a milder interpretation by which all may be restored, and Christ’s triumph over sin and misery be rendered complete and universal.

makes their salvation possible. ^{*} It does nothing more—it does not make salvation certain. Salvation is not a necessary consequence on redemption, though redemption is a necessary condition to salvation. Redemption places certain blessings within your reach; but those blessings must be laid hold on, and appropriated by faith, in order to salvation. You have, therefore, not the smallest right to suppose, or even to conjecture, that because all men have been redeemed, all will be finally saved. Nay, in place of thinking that the fact of our redemption proves there can be no such thing as everlasting punishment, I should be disposed to take this redemption as furnishing a vast argument in support of its probability. It seems to me as if unredeemed man had no power of sinning, when compared with redeemed. It seems as though no angel, no devil, could perpetrate an act deserving to be characterized as heinous and desperate, when set side by side with what is daily wrought on this earth. The “treading under foot the Son of God,” the “counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing”—this which only man can do, this which perhaps only man would do, must be more criminal than any other imaginable act—the manifestation of a blacker ingratitude and deadlier enmity. Redemption has just made it possible to commit a sin immeasurably deeper and darker, than he could ever have committed had he not been the object of the Mediator’s interference, or could be committed amongst other orders of being, who never needed, or never experienced, so wondrous a display of the love of their Maker. There can be no sin rivalled in its turpitude by that of despising and rejecting the crucified Saviour. And therefore, forasmuch as the fact of our redemption may enable us to be immense in our guiltiness, I know not why it should be thought to furnish any argument against our being eternally under punishment. Oh! you may think, that so much would never have been done for us had not God designed and fixed our everlasting happiness. You appeal to the humiliation of the Son of God; you appeal to His agonies; you appeal to His wounds; you appeal to His death. And I also appeal to these. I appeal to His humiliation, as not subduing man’s pride; I appeal to His agonies, as not exciting man’s sympathies; I appeal to His wounds, as producing no hatred of sin; I appeal to His death, as followed by no faith in His propitiation. And in place of arguing from the humiliation, the agonies, the wounds, the death, that

*So it appears, Jesus C. has not really secured
 Redemption or Salvation, but merely its possibility.
 what sad trifling & bungling the preacher falls
 into. P.H.*

because they have been endured they must ensure us happiness, I would rather argue that because they may be despised they may entail upon us wretchedness.* Yes, I go with you to Gethsemane and to Calvary; I travel with you over the hallowed ground; I mark the amazing conflict; I hear the mysterious cry; and I return with an overpowering feeling, that to reject the Mediator must be to perpetrate a sin which no thought can measure, no penalty surpass, and therefore with a strengthened conviction that the Bible is to be understood literally, when it says of the wicked that 'their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.' "

We shall not now stop to offer any lengthened observations, as we purpose to speak of the design and result of future punishment in a separate letter, but content ourselves with some passing remarks as we proceed. We are not to consider God in the light of an arbitrary legislator, making positive laws, and promising rewards or threatening punishment to those that obey or disobey, in order to enforce his laws. The eternal love of order is not an arbitrary law, it flows necessarily in the nature of things from the Divine essence; all who follow this eternal law must be happy, their *reward is not arbitrary*, God cannot but manifest his communicative goodness to those who love and obey him. *Neither are hell and damnation arbitrary punishments*; they are natural and necessary consequences of alienation and separation from God, and so long as we resist the Divine action in us, so long they must last. *Man therefore, punishes himself* by his opposition and resistance to the Divine nature. It is humanizing and degrading the Deity to suppose that he can be offended by our crimes, or his glory added to by our virtues; he is interested in the one and the other only in so far as the former *retard*, and the latter *advance*, the supreme happiness of our nature. To return to the sermon—

" But we must advance a step further. Allowing that we have no right to conclude that because all men have been redeemed all will

* Most certainly, such obduracy must do so; no one can doubt it; but this is not the point controverted. Why was the word *eternal* omitted here?

be finally saved, it may be argued, that the known attributes of God—His justice, for example, and His goodness—are opposed to the supposition of His consigning His creatures to everlasting wretchedness. Let us examine this with some measure of attention. We suppose you all will admit, that in perfect consistence with His justice and goodness, God may appoint some measure and period of punishment to impenitent sinners. This is only allowing him to be the moral Governor of His creatures. He ceases to be such a governor if he do not rule by laws, or if when those laws are fixed He do not vindicate their authority. But if He punish, He must punish only, you think, for a finite period; it would be unjust or unmerciful, or both, to extend the punishment throughout eternity. Now this assumes, that the ends of punishment will be answered and satisfied in a finite period; if not, of course that punishment will be protracted through an infinite. And who is there among you, who will undertake to prove that the ends of punishment will be answered, if, after a given time, that punishment come to a close? What are the ends of punishment? * Not the gratification of any vindictive feeling in the breast of the ruler—not the repair of any injury done personally, nor the payment of any debt due personally to the ruler. The great ends of punishment are the maintenance of the sacredness of the laws—the striking a wholesome terror into those who would be encouraged to imitation by the impunity of criminals, and the securing the well-being of the loyal and the obedient. Why, men talk of future punishment, as though sinners had a certain fine to pay, of which every day's suffering exhausted some fraction. They forget that they are punished for the *sake of the general good*†—punished that there may be a full demonstration to all orders of God's intelligent creatures, of the hatefulness of transgression, and that other beings who might be tempted to rebel may be confirmed in obedience by the fearful consequences of

* With God, first, the separation of sin from the sinner; and, finally, his restoration and recovery to himself. *See Leviticus xxvi. Chap.*

† What, are myriads of our fellow creatures to be exhibited by God in *eternal* torments for the good of others, and that *only*? To assume such a fact as this, is worse than humanizing the Deity; it is demonizing Him. No, no, such an idea we cannot entertain a moment. It wants the marks of the Divine characteristics.

breaking the commandment. There is no vindictiveness in God. God does not punish in order that he may wring out from the suffering of the sinner some tribute which has been withheld, or paid but in part. If the question between God and the sinner were only some personal debt which God might remit, or some personal claim which he might forego, it would perhaps be hard to find a reason why God might not pardon without punishing at all. But there could not be a falser view of the case. God does not punish, if the expression be lawful, in his private capacity, but altogether in His public, as the universal Lord, the moral Governor of the countless tribes with which he has peopled immensity. In this capacity He acted, when he refused to pardon without a propitiation, demanding that precious blood should be shed ere He would extend forgiveness to men. It was not that he delighted in blood—it was only that he had to uphold the majesty of His violated law, and to give an impressive lesson to all parts of His empire as to his hatred of sin and His resolve to take vengeance.”

Yes, from His boundless love to the sinner, He resolves to *pursue sin* with vengeance—with all sorts of pain and torment, till it is *separated* and *annihilated* from his creatures, and so long as they are obdurate—so long will infinite mercy contend, but this will not last for ever, omnipotent power and infinite wisdom must finally overcome finite impotence and human folly. Sometimes the reasoning of the preacher runs as if we denied the *certainty* of future punishment; whereas “the only thing debated is whether future misery will be everlasting—the single question to which we are to seek a satisfactory answer;” and we think his position very faulty in some other respects, for what idea are we to connect with the expression, “an eternity of retribution,” the notion of endless torments? He proceeds,—

“And precisely the same is to be advanced in regard of the future punishment of those who die impenitent. It is in His capacity of universal Governor, it is with a view to the general good of His intelligent creation, that God gives up the obdurate to the fire and the worm; and you must show me that it would be for the general good—at least, that it would not be for the general injury—to

release sinners at some time or another from their wretchedness, ere you can show that God would act contrary to His character were He to make that wretchedness everlasting.* But this you can never show; you can never prove that it may not be advantageous to God's intelligent creatures, that there should be a perpetual exhibition of the consequences of disobedience."

We do not attempt to disprove that disobedience produces wretchedness, for it is mercifully ordained that sin, while it exists, inevitably occasions misery, but we deny the *perpetuity*—the eternity—of this state of things; the experience of man's having bitterly known what evil is will serve to confirm him in the good, although all evil and its consequences shall have ceased; and what man, who has the least pretence to justice or humanity, would wish to purchase a transient good at the expense of, or under the possibility of involving others in *eternal* torments!! But the preacher says,—

"*It may be*, that the † wretchedness of lost spirits will minister to the steadfastness of God's subjects in the various sections of His unlimited empire. Who, then, can say, that it will not be essential to the general good that this wretchedness should be for ever?"

And *it may not be*; one supposition is as good as another,—that is, good for nothing as an argument, yet no other end than this can be supposed for the opinion of *eternal* misery, for those who hold the doctrine of endless punishment, hold also, that the sufferings of the damned can make no satisfaction for their sins, nor conduce to their benefit. What end then can be answered by this *eternal* punishment? It cannot be profitable to angels or saints, who are perfectly confirmed in a holy and happy state, for if their state be then fixed it can receive no addition in these respects. It cannot be profitable to them that suffer, for their state (according to this opinion) can never be bettered, if they are for ever to remain in an unalterable state of sin and misery. And can we believe that God will

* To a candid enquiring mind we hope we have done this, but we fear the preacher's tenacity is too much for us.

† Why is the word "*eternal*" again omitted, which is the pith of the controversy.

inflict a punishment that can produce *no good end*, either to saints or sinners? or that He will make any—not to say the greatest part of his creatures—*eternally* miserable, for no other end than to show His implacability, and make His power known in their “immortal wretchedness.” The opinion is too monstrous to be received. It destroys all our ideas of God and wants the stamp of the Divine characteristic, therefore none of the preacher’s hypothetical considerations are admissible; for if we admit that to be done by infinite goodness which is an inconceivable *evil to some* of his creatures—the infliction of *eternal* misery—for the advantage of some others, merely on the ground that for aught we know, *it may be* “essential to the general good that this wretchedness should be for ever,” we can never then argue any thing from the Divine goodness,—it can never then be proved that God hath not made some of his creatures on *purpose* that they might be *miserable*. And, *if it may be* “that the *eternal* wretchedness of lost spirits will minister to the steadfastness of God’s subjects,” it can never be concluded from the consideration of the *Divine goodness* that he will not annihilate the pure and spotless angels! and if to say, for aught we know, it may be essential for the general good that some should be miserable for ever, and ‘it may be,’ some annihilated for the good of others, then I say, we shall never be able to prove any thing from *this*, or any other *attribute of Deity*. And if it be enough to answer an argument to say, it may be thus and thus for aught we know, when there is not the least sign or appearance of any such thing,—*then nothing can be proved*, and we are condemned to complete pyrrhonism. We shall never, for instance, from the order, beauty, and wise contrivance of things that do appear, prove there is a God, if it were sufficient to answer, that things are indeed so made in this earth on which we live, *but it may be* they are framed very oddly, ridiculously, and incongruous in some other worlds which we know nothing of. If this be arguing, then any thing might be answered. But to return—

“*And if it be essential to the general good, who again will say,*

that it would not consist with the attributes of the universal Ruler to make it eternal? 'What!' I hear one of you exclaim, 'is the general good to be sought by injustice to an individual? is a man to be punished beyond his deserts, in order that he may furnish a continued lesson to other orders of being?' Nay, but, O man, who speaks of a punishment exceeding desert? I have spoken only of what must be the ends of punishment under such a government as the Divine; I have contended only that until these ends are accomplished it cannot be at variance, but must be in accordance with the character of the Governor, to continue punishment. The desert of a crime, its proper retribution, is exactly what is required for the general good that the criminal should endure. Any other definition of desert must proceed on some vain idea of injury done personally to the Ruler, which is to be precisely repaid by the sufferings exacted from the offender; and such a definition it is not worth while to stop to prove false, though we should be quite ready to meet the popular idea, and examine the objection as it is commonly put. There is a disproportion, you think, between sin and its punishment; sin must be finite, its punishment is infinite. Do you mean to say that the guilt of sin must be finite, because sin is committed in a finite time and by a finite being? But remember that it is committed against an infinite Being; and *may it not* derive, from the immenseness of Him of whose law it is an infraction, an immenseness of criminality, which shall render necessary an *eternity of retribution*?"

Most decidedly we do affirm that sin is a *finite* offence, because it is the act of a finite being. It is false philosophy and falser divinity, and the most illogical idea possible, to say otherwise, for it is an indisputable rule in logic that no effect can be greater than its cause, but here we have the idea of a finite cause producing an infinite effect!! and if sin be an infinite offence, because it is committed against an infinite being, then *all sins* are infinite, hence the distinction and degrees of crime are lost. The criminality of man is in proportion to the extent of his knowledge, therefore he must possess infinite knowledge before he can commit an infinite offence; and if he can commit an infinite offence, he can effect an infinite good! It is absurd and a contradiction in terms to say that a finite being can do an

infinite act, for the total—the aggregate of all finite never can amount to infinity. I beg here to insert an extract (from Southwood Smith, M.D.) “on the Divine Government.” He says—“The advocates of this extraordinary opinion (the *eternity* of of punishment) endeavour to establish it by an argument no less singular than the doctrine itself. Sin, they say, is an infinite evil because it is committed against an infinite person; the heinousness of an offence, they contend, increases in proportion to the dignity of the personage against whom it is committed, hence a crime against a king is always visited with greater severity of punishment than an offence against an ordinary person. Since, therefore, God is infinite, and since every sin is an offence against God, every sin is an infinite evil. The full reply to this reasoning is, that it is not rank or station which aggravates a crime, but its tendency to occasion misery; an offence against a king, it is true, is of a greater magnitude and is punished with more severity than the injurious treatment of an ordinary person, but the reason is, that an offence against a king is likely to be attended with worse consequences than one against a private person. If a king be treated with insult or injustice, a whole nation may be injured and thrown into commotion. In the one case, the evil attaches to a single individual; in the other, to millions of people; in the one case, therefore, it is much greater than the other, as the sum of an evil which extends to millions exceeds that which attaches only to a single individual. Besides, were sin an infinite evil, there could be no degree in transgression, for when speaking of infinity it is absurd to talk of greater or less; all human actions, therefore, all the language of mankind, all laws, human and divine, and all punishments contradict this opinion, for they all proceed upon the principle, that some crimes are of greater magnitude than others. We know, too, that Deity distinguishes in the most exact manner between different offences; that he apportions to each an equitable degree of punishment, and that he who has sinned greatly shall be beaten with many, and he who has offended less with fewer stripes. Indeed, it is,

when we consider the minute shades by which different sins and even different characters are discriminated, that we perceive in the most forcible manner the impossibility both of the doctrine of endless misery and of limited punishment terminated by destruction. How slight is the difference between the worst good man and the best wicked man, how impossible it is for the utmost exertion of human sagacity to distinguish between them, yet for this imperceptible difference in character, there is, according to these doctrines, an infinite difference in destiny; he who is lowest in the scale of goodness, and who differs from the best wicked man only by the slightest shade, is admitted to infinite happiness; he in whom wickedness preponderates upon the whole, but in so small a degree that no human penetration can discover it, is shut out from the enjoyment of heaven, doomed by one doctrine to inconceivable torments through endless ages, and by the other to dreadful sufferings for a very protracted period, and then to endless extinction of being; according to one opinion, the positive *torment*, according to the other, the positive *loss*, is infinite! yet the difference in desert is indistinguishable! This is a disproportion to which there is no parallel in any of the works of Deity, and which cannot exist, it is reasonable to believe, in any of His dispensations." But to return to the sermon—

"Besides, does not the condemned sinner go on sinning? What, think you, is the society of hell? Is there a godly sorrow there? is there contrition? is there repentance? Know ye not the sentence (the voice of the living God hath pronounced it)—‘He that is unjust let him be unjust still, and he that is filthy let him be filthy still.’ Therefore the vices, the passions, the uncleanness of earth must, in one way or other, be perpetuated in hell. Oh! the anarchy, the blasphemy, the fierce and fiend-like dissoluteness of a place into which shall be carried all that even now, goes far towards turning into a pandemonium this *redeemed*, this *blood-bought creation*! Thus those who are tossing in the troubled abyss shall be continually committing fresh sin, and therefore continually deserving fresh punishment. So that, even if your hypothesis were correct, that the penalty incurred by sins here on this earth must

be exhausted in a finite period, would there not be fresh penalties demanded in a yet further period? and when these were wrung out, would there not be another set requiring another age of woe? and are you not thus travelling on, from one period to another, till you are lost in the calculation, and yet are as far off as at first from the close?" *See note at the end of this letter Page 51. **

From whence does the preacher obtain all this minute information? Certainly not from Scripture. The powers of imagination are truly fertile; however we cannot but think it very like beating the air, it is darkening counsel with words without knowledge, and strange indeed thus to speak of "*this redeemed, this blood-bought creation,*" if this is to be its condition as long as God exists! Again, we observe, how true it is, that when we attempt to reason from a *false* principle the consequences are conflicting and absurd. Take one instance among many others: if the foregoing statement of the *eternity* of hell torments be true, we must conclude upon *one of two things*; either, that God cannot put an end to sin and its consequences, or that He will not. If He cannot do this, He ceases to be omnipotent; if He will not, He must approve of it. Hence we are thrown upon the two horns of a dilemma, they are rather sharp ones, (and no alternative)—upon which shall we rest? There is evidently some uneasiness manifested, and no wonder, for the preacher says—

"I shall, perhaps, hear something about mercy; I shall be told that such a love as the Divine will surely interpose, and finally deliver those over whom we know it has yearned. But bethink yourselves, that with such a Being as God, there can be no sphere for mercy which is not made by justice. It must be the vainest of all thoughts, (for it is supposing a want of harmony amongst the attributes of a Being every way perfect,) that which a longer punishment would be just it will be curtailed and contracted. Oh! build upon anything, sooner than on the hollow expectation that God's tenderness is that effeminate sentiment which is not proof against suffering, and which sooner than allow pain would sacrifice truth."

It is God's tender love for his creatures that permits pain

and suffering to overtake the sinner, for the express purpose of detaching him from his sin. All punishment, under the Divine government, is the chastisement and correction of a *Father* towards disobedient children,—subduing in its effect and beneficial in its result, because it is *infinite love* contending with *finite error and folly*, clearing the way for the manifestation of the superabounding grace of God through Jesus Christ. Again we read—

“I know that ‘God is love;’ I know that thought cannot measure His love; high as the highest heaven, deep as the deepest depths, wide as the east from the west, it occupieth the universe and embraceth whatsoever liveth. It is love of Himself; it is love of His Son; it is love of the innumerable tribes, which hang on His bounty and celebrate His praise;—it is not the love of a solitary and sinful race alone, though that race has its full share in the amiable feeling. And if it be love of Himself, love of His Son, love of innumerable intelligent tribes, as well of that single race to which we belong, dare I calculate on a tenderness, which will not suffer me to be tormented, though in rescuing me from the tormentor He must *perhaps* compromise those perfections which He loves, put a slight on the sacrifice of that Son whom He loves, and endanger the well-being of those countless tribes whom He loves? * Yes; reckon on God’s love till you expect it so to act that His attributes shall be forgotten, His threatenings falsified, His oath disregarded; but remember, that then you are reckoning on a love which would be worse than a weakness. And judge ye how long hell must last, if it be a love such as this which is to bring it to a close; judge ye, whether it must not be literally an eternity which is denoted by the expression, ‘Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.’ ”

* Here, again, we perceive that hydra-headed monster opinion (the *eternity* of hell torments) raising its ghastly front in the inconsistent inferences of this hypothetical tirade, and in supposing the *endless* misery of some in God’s creation is required for the benefit of others! that one man is made miserable merely for the advantage of another, and *that only*! Is not such an idea of God’s acting most irrational, and can it be exempt from the utmost cruelty and injustice?

No, sir ! we will not presume to "judge how long hell must last ;" this is not within the province of man's judgment, although the preacher has peremptorily done so in declaring it to be *eternal*, but God only knows "how long." The eternity or non-eternity of it is a question within our sphere of thinking, and we say to every reflecting man, "*judge ye*,"—*judge ye*, if ye will, which opinion squares with those plain, incontestable, self-evident truths revealed in Scripture, and *which of these two opinions bears the stamp of the Divine characteristics.*

The remainder of the sermon is taken up in its application to the charitable claims of King's College Hospital, and is ingenious enough with the impassioned style of the speaker, and is accompanied by one or two apologies, but I do not think it needful to trouble you with the same.

* note for page 49. (From Foster's Life Letters)

(It is usually alleged that there will be an *endless* continuance of sinning, with probably an *endless* aggravation, and therefore the punishment must be *endless*. Is not this like an admission of disproportion between the punishment and the original cause of its infliction ? But suppose the case to be so—that is to say, that the punishment is not a retribution simply for the guilt of the momentary existence on earth, but a continued punishment of the continued, ever aggravated guilt in the *Eternal State*; The allegation is of no avail in vindication of the doctrine; because the first consignment to the dreadful state necessitates a continuance of the criminality; The doctrine teaching that it is of the essence, and is an awful aggravation, of the original consignment, that it dooms the condemned to maintain the criminal spirit unchanged for ever. The doom to sin as well as to suffer (according to the argument, to sin in order to suffer, is inflicted as the punishment of the sin committed in the mortal state). virtually, therefore, the *Eternal-punishment* is the punishment of sins in time."

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LETTER VI.

DEAR SIR,

THE *design* and *final result* of future punishment having been pretty freely discussed and shewn in the preceding letters, a few observations may suffice in conclusion of our enquiry.

God said respecting David, through the prophet Nathan, “I will be his Father, and he shall be my son; if he commit iniquity, I will chastise him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men, *but my mercy shall not depart from him.*” This is precisely the procedure of God in regard to his creatures universally, and is an intimation of his conduct to all mankind. He does not act from one principle to-day, and an opposite one to-morrow. “He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;” and the “Lord will not cast off for ever, but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men, to crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth.” Lam. iii, 31—34. And let it be remembered, that the proper tendency and the final cause of evils and sufferings in this present state are to do us good, they are a suitably adapted mean to this end, and the all-wise, merciful Governor of the world makes use of them as such; the voice of reason and experience confirm this, and Scripture concurs herewith in speaking of the punishment, evils, or suffering, which it pleases God to bring upon the sons of men as a proper discipline and chastisement, in order to humble, subdue, and bring down, *that good may result in their final issue.* Numerous intimations to this purport are scattered all over the Bible. Note the lxxxix. Psalm, 30—33,—“If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then

will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail." And if punishment and suffering, correction and chastisement in this life, are mercifully intended for the good of the *patients themselves*, why not in the next life? Is the character of God, as the Father of mercies and God of pity and grace, limited to this world only? Why are we not to suppose, that the infinitely benevolent Deity is the same good God in the other world as in this? and that He has the same kind and good intentions in the punishment of the next state that He has in this, namely, the benefit and profit of the sufferers themselves? But St. Paul has decided this point in his epistle to the Hebrews,—“Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; *but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness.*”—xii. 9, 10. And our Lord has feelingly illustrated and taught us how to argue from this relation,—“If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him.” Think, therefore, what is, or ought to be, the disposition and conduct of fathers on earth; though they are evil to their offspring, they readily do them good as they are able while they behave suitably, and as readily chastise them for their profit when they need correction; but they do not put off the bowels of fathers, and punish their children without pity, *having no view to their individual advantage.* What an opinion should we form of those parents who should inflict pain and suffering on their own children, without any intention or desire to promote their welfare thereby in any degree? And shall we entertain such an idea of our Father in heaven (who instead of being evil as all earthly fathers are, more or less, is infinitely good) which we cannot suppose of any father on earth, 'till we have divested him of the

heart of a father? Can it reasonably be conceived, that that God who calls mankind His offspring without exception, and himself their Father, should torment them *eternally* and without any intention or design to do them the least imaginable good, as must be the case if the opinion of never-ending misery be true? Once more I ask, Does such an idea bear any marks of the Divine characteristics?

I have to give you some reasons, why I cannot at present receive as a truth the opinion of the *eternity* of future punishment. And, first, I affirm, that “the fair and candid interpretation of the statements of Scripture” *do not teach such a doctrine*; and we think we have made this clearly evident: as also, secondly, That such an opinion is *diametrically at variance*, both with the “scheme of redemption, and with the known attributes of God.” And I ask, upon what basis the proofs alleged to support the *eternity* of hell torments are founded? Why purely upon some three or four ambiguous words and equivocal expressions of “everlasting,” “for ever,” “the worm that dieth not,” &c. and which, as has been demonstrated, may be taken in different senses. But what are the supports of the contrary opinion,—“*the restitution of all things*, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began”? Acts iii, 21. Those very plain, incontestable, unchangeable truths (see digression in Letter II.) which are the basis of all religion; and were I to illustrate this more fully, I must transcribe the whole Bible, from the first promise recorded in Genesis, “The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head,” to the final doxology of all beings, as stated in the Revelations, for the whole scope and design of Scripture is to show forth the ultimate triumph and glorious result of the incarnation and death of our Lord and *Restorer*, Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians, (xv. 22—28) has most clearly pointed out with great force and detail this truth, That Jesus Christ came to restore all things; but if he saves only a small number, all things are so far from being restored that there would be but a handful so favoured,

whilst the many would continue eternally in disorder and misery ! No sooner did *Adam* fall, but the promise of salvation was made to him, and in him, to all his posterity. The Apostle is very express on this point, I Cor. xv. 22—"As in *ADAM* *all* die, so in *CHRIST* shall *all* be made alive." And what the Apostle subjoins is a proof that this will occur at very different periods. "But every man (says he) in his own order : *Christ* the first-fruits ; afterwards they that are *Christ's* at his coming." It is plain that by this coming he means the last judgment, and by those that are *Christ's* the souls of the *just* ; nevertheless, he afterwards speaks of another *future period*, which he calls the end, v. 24—"Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father." But what is *this end* ? That all things shall be subdued unto him—28. Is this a forced or a willing subjection ? If the former, he would never speak of it as a thing to come, because from the foundation of the world all things are subject to him ; if the latter, then there is no more hell ; and what follows seems to prove this very clearly—"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." Is the separation of the soul from the body the death here meant ? No ; for after the coming of *Christ* there is no room for death ; besides, this separation is not what the Scripture calls death, which is only termed *sleep*, and particularly in this chapter, where the Apostle never speaks of the dead but under the idea of persons falling asleep ; and what he here calls death, "the great death," (II Cor. i. 10) *is a separation from God*, which was the death spoken of to *Adam*, "in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," and without this death there would be no hell, so that when it is destroyed hell will be no more. Another proof that the death here mentioned is not temporal death is, that St. Paul ranks it with the enemies of God, over whom *JESUS CHRIST* shall reign till they are all destroyed ; but temporal death, far from being of the number of his enemies, is an agent of his power, employed in executing his orders. It is the spiritual death which is called enmity against God,—a rebellion of the creature against the

Creator ; it is this death to which the title of enemy perfectly agrees. Again, let us observe, that St. Paul supposes this enemy shall subsist even after Christ's coming, and that he shall reign till it is destroyed, abolished, as well as all rule and authority and power. (v. 54.) It is evident these titles of rule, &c. can refer only to the power of darkness and the sovereignty of the devil, since all earthly dominion shall then have had an end. But what then is the design of destroying all those enemies? It answers an end worthy of Infinite wisdom, that of reuniting to himself all his creatures by a voluntary subjection, after having reigned over them with a rod of iron, and consumed them as wicked men in his wrath. Then the Son shall deliver up the mediatorial kingdom to his Father, that *God may be all and in all*.*

These last words seem to me indisputably to prove the total abolition of sin and hell, and the final restoration of the creatures, which is further confirmed by the exclamation of St. Paul, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" If death and the grave have no sting but sin, and this sting must be destroyed, does it not hence follow that hell must be destroyed also? since it is certain, that if sin were annihilated in man, there would be no more hell. But not to stop here, let us see whether the Scriptures do not teach the same truth in other places. St. Paul, in the first of Colossians, declares what was the good pleasure of God in sending His Son into the world. "For it pleased the Father (says he) that in him should all fulness dwell; that by him (v. 20) he might reconcile all things to himself; whether they be things in heaven, or things on earth." Observe here an universal reconciliation of all the creatures to God, a truth as clearly revealed in verse 15. In the first of Ephesians the same truth is declared, (v. 9, 10) mention is made of the mystery of the will of God, which he had hitherto kept to himself, and what is this mystery? "To

* These words would have no sense if hell torments were *eternal*. God can never be all and in all but by restoring the order of things.

gather together in *one all things in CHRIST*, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him." And when will He do this? "in the dispensation of the fulness of time;" that is to say, when all things shall be subjected to him, and when He shall be exalted above all principalities and powers, and dignities and dominion, and above every name that is named both in this life and that which is to come. The same Apostle, in xi. Romans, declares a great mystery, that those who before had rebelled against God and been cut off because of their unbelief, should be again grafted in and finally obtain mercy, for he adds, "God hath included them all in unbelief." What for? That he might send them to eternal torments? No, no!—"That he might have mercy on all." Well might the Apostle make the exclamation, (wherein much more is understood than expressed) "Oh the depth both of the riches and wisdom of God; how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor?" Let us remark here the relation these words bear to those quoted from I. Ephes., concerning the will of God, which till now he had kept within his own breast, and which is nothing but the thought of a Saviour, or the design he has conceived of mercy to all, which is evident from the conclusion, "For of him, and by him, and for him, are all things." It would be easy to quote still a great many more other passages to the same purpose, as Heb. ii. 9, where it is said that "Jesus Christ tasted death for all men;" and elsewhere, "That he is made the propitiation for the sins of the whole world;" and in the ii. of Philp., "That every knee should bow at the name of Jesus, of things in heaven," &c. We will only dwell a little on the last verses of the v. Romans, that are very clear and decided, where the Apostle compares JESUS CHRIST to ADAM, as also the fruits we reap from each, "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so that death is passed upon all men. In like manner by the righteousness of one, the free gift is come upon all men to justification of life;" for he adds, "As by the disobedience of one, many," &c. The word

many in this place undoubtedly comprehends all men ; all men were made sinners by *Adam*, therefore all ought to be made righteous by *Jesus Christ* ; and here we may justly apply that excellent, but abused text, “ Where sin did abound, grace did much more abound.” That is, the grace of *Jesus Christ* is so abundant that it shall at last destroy in all mankind the sins they inherited from *Adam*, so that as sin has reigned unto death, in like manner grace shall reign by righteousness unto eternal life ; as if he had said, the reign of sin and death must come to an end, to make room for that of grace through all eternity.

I believe, sir, it would be quite superfluous to add more authorities to those we have considered, since those include the most clear and distinct intimation concerning the *design and result of the incarnation and death of JESUS CHRIST*.

We may just observe, that all those numerous passages in the Psalms, that speak of the anger of God as enduring but a moment, and His mercy as enduring for ever, are against the doctrine of *eternal* misery. Mercy respects the objects of misery, as the etymology of the word shows. Now, if this mercy is wholly confined to this short life (which is but a moment), and the wrath of God pursues sinners, who die such, through all eternity, then we may reverse the words and say, His *mercy* endureth but a moment, but His *wrath* endureth for ever ! !

LETTER VII.

DEAR SIR,

I CANNOT receive the opinion in question as a truth, because it seems to me *contrary to practical religion*. God hath commanded us to *pray for all men*, even our enemies, that they might be saved, and to pray for it without doubting, (I Tim. ii. 1—8.) How can those do so who believe in *endless* misery? God hath commanded us to *love all men*, but if he hates and will damn to all eternity millions of mankind, why should I love all? Must we be more perfect than our Creator? We are commanded to *forgive all men* upon pain of not being forgiven if we do not, but the opinion of *endless* torments teaches that God will never forgive all men! We are commanded to *do good to all men*, but the doctrine of *endless* misery informs me that though God does good to the unjust in this life for a few days, His mercy will change, and he will utterly forsake them *eternally* at death! I ask, how can that opinion be true which so plainly contradicts all these His commands?

Note the following extract from a very learned and critical work, "*Universal Restitution, a Scriptural Doctrine*," written by Dr. Stonehouse, formerly rector of Islington. He says, "Of Damnation and Restoration. All men, as sons of *Adam*, are under doom of *æonian* death; all men, as heirs of *Christ*, are destined to *æonian* life; but then this life being in *Christ* only as the root, must first be by him quickened in man before that man can live, and this quickening is his *Restoration*, when we are begotten of God; then only are we restored, by having a new spiritual life begotten in us, by being quickened in *Christ's* *æonian* life, i. e., by being new begotten by our *second Adam*, as really as we were before of our natural parent. But then where this regenerating does not happen before the day of the divine wrath is disclosed, there is *damnation*, or the being

condemned to the suffering of that wrath ; as the reverse of this is *salvation*, or the being saved from the power of that wrath, and thus you arrive at the *difference between the terms restored and saved*. Neither life nor salvation belong to us as men ; as men all are obnoxious to divine wrath, and doomed to the terrors of the æonian death ; wrath is our natural element, and death our natural tendency. Yet, then, when Christ's seed of immortality is within us, that which in the *lost* may seem to be the wrath of God revealed, will prove in us a kindling of life instead of death, and heaven instead of hell. And now let us put our question : It being the will of God that all men shall be restored, or become quick in spiritual life. whenever this happens, viz., that all men do so live, is not the will of God in this respect accomplished ? And may he not then have reached *an end* in creating man worthy his love and benevolence ? If God created man for the enjoyment of divine life, the purpose of God is effected when the divine life is generated in a man ; also the works of Satan, which Christ came to dissolve, are then in that degree dissolved. Or to apply the term *deliver* in this case : God expressly willeth that all men shall be delivered from their misery. This, therefore, *their deliverance must certainly be effected in its due time*. But God willeth not expressly that all men shall be kept, preserved, or saved from falling into misery. Misery, therefore, may happen to many ; there is no decree of God against it ; it therefore stands among the possibilities of nature." And awful and dreadful will the wrath and the indignation be which many will experience in that state of the æonian punishment to which all who die ungodly will be consigned at the general judgment.

Finally, Universal restoration appears to me evidently true, from the many testimonies recorded in the Scriptures, and from the following considerations :

1st. *From the revealed perfections of God*. That He is righteous and loveth righteousness, Psa. xi. 7, " The Lord loveth righteousness ;" therefore He must hate wickedness. Hence this perfection, which is the same as justice, calls for the

destruction of all unrighteousness and injustice, and requires the abolishing thereof out of the creation. "Good and upright is the Lord, therefore he will teach sinners in the way." (Psa. xxv. 8.) This text gives a permanent reason for sinners being taught of the Lord, namely, his goodness and uprightness; hence, while he is good and upright, he must continue to teach sinners, till they are brought into the way. "The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works." (cxlv. 9.) If his goodness extends to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works, his goodness must surely lead all finally to repentance, and his tender mercies must relieve them at last from all their miseries.

2ndly. *From the relation God sustains to His creatures.* He is said to be the God of the spirits of all flesh, and in Job xiv. 15. we read, "Thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hand." God will then certainly not forsake any work of his, but recover all his works at last, and bring them into such a state of purity and felicity that he shall rejoice in all his works together. Jehovah is called the God of the spirits of all flesh, (Numb. xxvii. 16) "The Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh;" and if our Lord proved the resurrection of the dead, or the future life from this relation, (Luke xx. 37, 38,) may not the recovery of all spirits from the second death be proved from this relation also? He is called the *Father of Spirits*, (Heb. xii. 9.) The Apostle Paul affirms also that all are his offspring, (Acts xvii. 29;) and our Lord hath taught us how much may be expected from such a relation, (Matt. vii. 11.)

3rdly. *From God's purpose concerning His creatures.* Which is revealed to us in the clearest manner in Ephes. i. 9, 10, "Having made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself, that in the dispensation in the fulness of the times he might gather in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in him." This purpose, which is according to the counsel of the divine will and pleasure, must be fully and certainly accomplished, for having spoken it, he will bring it to

pass ; having purposed it, he will do it ; (Isa. xiv. 10, 11.) The original word rendered *gathered together in one*, is from *ana*, emphatic, or again ; and *kephalaion*, a head, or sum total, and signifies to *reunite under one head*. This eminent gathering, or union of all things, is to be accomplished in the dispensation of the fulness, or complete number of the times, ages, or seasons, which the Father holds in his own power and appointed for the final accomplishment of his purpose to all his creatures.

4thly. *From the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ, and his mediatorial dispensation.* “For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell ; and, having made peace by the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself ; by him, I say, whether they be things in heaven, or things on earth.” (Col. i. 19, 20.) This text shows that it is the Father’s pleasure that all things shall be reconciled by Christ, and as he will most certainly do all his pleasure, all things must finally be reconciled ; and sin, which is the work of the devil, being that which has broken the harmony of the creation, must therefore be utterly destroyed out of the creation before universal reconciliation takes place, and so we are informed, (I John iii. 8) “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” And sin, being a plant that God never planted, it must be rooted up, as Christ himself testifies, (Matt. xv. 13) “*Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up ;*” and (Matt. xxviii. 18) “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth ;” by which power, “according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself,” (Phill. iii. 21,) “That he might fill all things,” (Eph. iv. 10.) And when the design and end of the mediatorial government is fully accomplished, by overcoming all disobedience, destroying all sin, and reconciling all things to God, then the iron rod will be broken, and all coercion will cease with the delivering up the kingdom to God, even the Father, which will introduce the final state of supreme, eternal, and

immutable bliss, under an economy in which GOD WILL BE THE ALL IN ALL. (I. Cor. xv. 24—28.

5thly. *From the super-abounding of Grace over Sin.* We are informed, that where sin abounded grace abounded much more, Rom. v. 20, “But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” The words rendered *abounded* and *did much more abound*, are in the Greek both expressed in the indefinite tense, and are therefore confined to no time ; so that wherever sin *has* abounded, *doth* abound, or *shall* abound, there grace either *hath* abounded, *doth*, or *will* much more abound. This sense of the tense must be admitted, or else the words can afford no comfort after the time they were penned, and the Apostle gives no other character of *place*, but only that it is where sin hath abounded. We, therefore, conclude, that wherever sin hath abounded, grace will much more abound ; and, consequently, that as sin hath reigned unto death, so grace will reign through righteousness unto life ; therefore (Rom. v. 18) “As by the *offence* of one, judgment came upon all men unto condemnation ; *even so*, by the righteousness of one, the *free gift* came upon all men unto justification of life,” and (Titus ii. 11) “The grace of God that brought salvation hath appeared to all men ;” or, as the passage might be read, the grace of God hath appeared that bringeth salvation to all men. Hence God is said to be the Saviour of all men. (I Tim. iv. 10) “For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe ;” which text plainly shews the expression of all men is not to be *limited* to those who believe the gospel in the present dispensation, for those are spoken of *as distinct* from the all men, of whom God is the Saviour also, though not in such a special manner ; and the Scriptures inform us that the difference will be this, that those who believe and obey the gospel in this life will be saved from the wrath to come, or condemnation to the lake of fire and brimstone ; but those that believe not, will fall into that condemnation and misery, though they shall be finally saved out of it, “yet so as by fire,” by Him who is the Restorer of all.

6thly. From *the nature of Prayer and Charity*. We are commanded to pray for all men, that all may come to the knowledge of the truth, and be saved ; and to our prayers we are to add endeavours, that as we have opportunity we may do good to all men. All prayer ought to be in faith, and faith must rest on the promises of God, or what he has declared in his word ; and although God has reserved to himself the times and seasons in which he will answer the prayers of his people, so that they must wait with patience, yet he will certainly answer all their prayers, and fulfil all their desires at last, that are agreeable to his will, for the hope and expectation of the just shall never perish, however long they may wait for the accomplishment thereof ; and in that prayer of our Lord recorded, John xvii. He prayed *for some things not yet accomplished*, which prayer respects *four* great objects. 1st, His own glorification, ver. 1—5. 2nd, The preservation and sanctification of his Apostles, that he might send them as his witnesses, and their union in the truth, ver. 6—19 ; this had a special reference to the Apostles which the Father had given him out of the world. 3rd, *Union among all those who should believe in him through their word*, v. 20, 21. And 4th, The bringing of the world to the knowledge and belief of the truth. The *third* of these objects has as yet been accomplished only in a limited and imperfect degree, and the *fourth remains* to be accomplished, for the world is still in a state of unbelief ; but this also will be accomplished, when all nations and all people are brought into the obedience of the faith, and the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ. So also the prayers of all the saints, that all men may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, will be accomplished when the rulers of this world, who have opposed the rule of Christ in their hearts, and all who have followed their wicked ways, shall, after their condemnation and æonian sufferings, hear the word of salvation they formerly despised. For that this word will finally be received by all is manifest from the declaration of the angel, who testified that the incarna-

tion of Christ should be glad tidings unto all people, Luke ii. 10, 11. Now it is plain that this will not be good tidings of great joy unto all people at the general judgment, for sorrow and anguish will then be the portion of very many ; but it will surely be glad tidings to all people finally for, *Psa. cxli. 6*, “ When their judges are overthrown in stony places, they shall hear my words, for they are sweet ;” and, *Isa. xxiv. 21, 22*, “ The Lord shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days they shall be visited.” The kings of the earth and their princes, counsellors, or judges, having combined against Jehovah and his Anointed, will surely experience a dreadful overthrow when they are cast down into the pit, or prison of hell, or the lake of fire and brimstone ; yet it appears that they will be at length visited with the tender mercies of the Most High, and they will hear his words which they formerly rejected, and find a sweetness in what once appeared to them disagreeable, and then they shall all praise Jehovah with joy, *Psa. cxxxviii. 4, 5*, “ All the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O Lord, when they hear the words of thy mouth ; yea, they shall sing in the ways of the Lord : for great is the glory of the Lord.” As the destruction of kings implies the destruction of their adherents, so their deliverance and happiness includes the deliverance and happiness of all those who suffered with them, in consequence of their being members of the several bodies of which kings have been heads. The nature of charity, also, necessarily supposes the final restoration of all to the love of God that ever were objects of charity, for “ charity never faileth,” *I Cor. xiii. 8*. Charity, or love, therefore, extends to all men, and if we are to love all men in this life, and love being that principle which can only make us desire and endeavour their good as we ought, then charity must fail in its extent, if those who possess that excellent grace must cease to love or desire the good of those

who fall into condemnation, for we cannot suppose it consistent, either with their own happiness or submission to the will of God, to love and desire the happiness of all men, if God has determined that some, not to say the greatest part of mankind, shall never be happy. We may, therefore, I think fairly conclude, that the *æonian* sufferings of the wicked will be the last painful operation that the Lord, the Deliverer, will perform, and that it will be effectual for the removal of every obstacle that obstructs their deliverance ; and when *thus viewed*, these awful *æonian* sufferings are every way consistent with Infinite Goodness, and the purest charity will not recoil, nor will the tenderest sympathies be shocked, at the idea.

It may, perhaps, be asked, will the future punishment of the wicked then communicate saving knowledge and holiness ? To which it may be replied, It is certain that those on whom God shall inflict this sore chastisement, will in the issue be made partakers of His holiness, and that “the issues of death,” even the second death, belong to Him who “quicken all things,” and to whom all live ; but the sufferings and death of the wicked in the lake will, perhaps, contribute no otherwise to these great ends than chastisement contributes to instruction, or it may produce in its subjects something analogous to what heat produces in metals, which gives them no form, but renders them susceptible of the most useful forms under the hand of a skilful artificer.

And 7thly. *From the declaration, that all things are to be inherited by Christ.* Heb. i. 1, 2, “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these latter days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things.” This appointment of the Father necessarily implies both a recovery of all from death that have been under its power, and the renewing of the image of God in all in whom it hath been lost, for Christ cannot be said to inherit what does not exist, nor can he be said to inherit what is unholy, or in a state of enmity

against him. His being the heir of all things, as necessarily implies that all things will finally be made subject to him; as the gift of the heathen for his inheritance implies, that the heathen shall become obedient unto him by the preaching of the gospel: since, therefore, Christ is appointed heir of all things, there appears the greatest ground to believe that nothing will be finally lost, nor will any *eternally* perish, but that all will be restored to the love of God and the enjoyment of him as their chief good. Then, and not till then, will God be all and all, and Christ inherit all things, and Jehovah rejoice in all his works together.

This transcendantly glorious and inexpressibly desirable, though distant event, appears therefore most certain, or the Lord Jesus Christ must fail in the inheritance of all things!—the love of God and his tender mercies must be limited or impotent!—His purpose to gather all things together by Christ must be defeated!—the declaration of Christ himself, that he makes all things new and will draw all to himself must be false!—The will of God that all should come to the knowledge of the truth and be restored, and the prayers of the faithful, that the wickedness of the wicked may come to an end, can never be fulfilled!—and charity must fail from many of its objects! if that glorious and desirable EVENT, the SUBJECTION, RECONCILIATION, and RESTORATION of ALL THINGS to the LOVE OF GOD shall fail of its full accomplishment.

Would not one naturally conclude that a doctrine like this, which is so clearly revealed and so consonant with the feelings and experience arising from the operation of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of Christians, would be *good news* to all, and cause them to praise God for this *universal efficacious love*? To one who is happy in this belief, it seems as though all upon the first view would come into it. But, no! Nature, pride, prejudice, and unbelief have their manifold objections, and rise up in alarm against it. It is *too good* news to some; it is *sad*, rather than “glad tidings” in their ears, who resemble the pettish prophet Jonah, who was displeased and angry at the unlimited mercy

of God to Nineveh. Some *cannot*, many *will not*, and more *dare not*, inquire into or receive this view of Gospel grace and salvation; but where these shackles are put away and obstacles removed, creeds and systems of divinity laid aside, and there be opportunity and ability, men are certainly bound to use the powers and talents God has given them in seeking to “come to the knowledge of the truth,” and Scripture only is the mine in which it should be searched,

LETTER VIII.

DEAR SIR,

I regret that my observations on the passage recorded, Matt. xii. 32,* failed in giving you the satisfaction desired. I did not “overlook the point and force of the objection,” for in fact I cannot perceive any; surely, then, I must be as blind as Elymas the sorcerer? The argument, you say, is this: “some sinners are never to be forgiven, but without forgiveness no man can enter heaven or enjoy happiness, therefore some will be for ever excluded from eternal bliss.”

I admit the premises, “some sinners are never to be forgiven,” but demur to the inference. You may say more, for *all impenitent* sinners, dying such, will never be forgiven; that is, the just and equitable punishment denounced against such characters will inevitably be inflicted: they are, therefore, not forgiven—they are not pardoned. Perhaps a case, by way of analogy, will illustrate our position. A man commits a crime on which the law denounces a certain punishment, and the crime whenever committed is never forgiven, therefore the offender endures the punishment—he is neither pardoned nor forgiven. You say, ‘without forgiveness no man can enter heaven or enjoy happiness;’ that is, can never become a changed character and qualified for happiness: but such an inference by no means *necessarily* follows, for the very punishment inflicted has been, or will be, a mean of correcting his bad habits and improving his moral character and restoring him, and at the expiration of his punishment he returns to his home a better man, a useful member of society, in fact a happy man, restored to his friends through the chastisement he has endured. His crime was never pardoned—was never forgiven him, yet we see him now a recovered man, happy in the enjoyments around

* “But whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.”

him. This is not a solitary case, there have been many such instances, and all the Divine chastisements have precisely this object,—the reformation and recovery of the individual. (See this fully argued in Letter VI.)

I presume you do not mean by the expression, ‘some sinners are never to be forgiven,’ that an individual may commit such an offence which God will *eternally* resent,—will never blot out; that the individual will never, so long as God exists, be received into his favour, no matter what improvement his moral character may at any future period have received from the paternal chastisement of his Creator. *Such an inference* would be indeed a presumption, most awfully charging Deity with vindictive implacability! but which cannot be for a moment admitted as belonging to Divinity, for “GOD IS LOVE,” (1 John iv.) ‘But without forgiveness no man can enter heaven, or enjoy bliss.’ Such is your inference, but the text does not state any such fact; the conclusions are, therefore, hypothetical, and if I am correct in the principles and views given of the ‘design and result of future punishment,’ a very different issue will succeed than that of torments *never ending*. Permit me to ask, upon what authority do you gather the presumption that such punishment is nothing less than *eternal* misery? Do you not assume what ought to be first proved, and may not the literal and severe interpretation of the text be conjectural and false? Do not you lay too much stress on the arbitrary assumption that the word ‘*never*’ must be taken in its most absolute sense, when innumerable instances prove the exception? and would you be content to base the opinion of *eternal* torments on the English translation of indefinite words and terms, which are equivocal and ambiguous? And for how dreadful a purpose is this distortion made—it is to condemn a fellow mortal and a fellow sinner into an *eternity* of woe! Surely we ought to pause and reflect sufficiently ere we rashly plunge into so awful a sentiment; and are you not arguing and contending for a principle of vindictive implacability as belonging to God, but which we know cannot exist in Deity? Once more do I

affirm and contend, that no interpretation of words or expressions can be admitted which is opposed or contrary to the Divine characteristics. We must, therefore, ground our arguments on known, unequivocal, immutable truths, and *never on mere expressions or words*, for these are the fruitful source of all the conflicting opinions afloat in the religious world. All pretend to find those opinions in Scripture, (vide examples given in the digression) and many divines have peremptorily enforced *their* interpretation of Scripture language as infallible truths which it is dangerous to disbelieve or to question! But we have the inexpressible satisfaction to find, that the doctrine so extensively received under the title of ‘Eternal Damnation,’ is unfounded; the *eternal* misery of a majority of mankind (God’s offspring), “men who are made after the likeness of God,” (James iii. 9), is totally unknown in Scripture; there is not a single passage, rightly interpreted, which will support the horrid dogma, and unless we be permitted to form our hypothesis first, and have recourse afterwards to Scripture and compel language to speak our sentiments, we shall not find a trace of that doctrine throughout the Old Testament. How could it then have been expected, in a dispensation of Grace,—in a gospel of glad tidings, which proclaims “Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good will towards men”?

But to return again ‘to the strife about words.’ In the passage alluded to, the original word is “aion,” rendered there “*world*,” (see my former remarks on the various rendering of this term in Letter III.) The word ‘aion’ always has reference to periods of time, and when used in the singular number means *age*, in the plural *ages*; this is its literal and true translation. You will discover that in Scripture there are different ages spoken of: ‘former ages,’ (Col. i. 26); ‘the present age,’ (Matt. xii. 32, the passage in question); ‘the approaching age,’ (Mark x. 30); ‘ages to come,’ (Eph. ii. 7); ‘the consummation of the age,’ (Matt. xxviii. 20); ‘the end of the ages,’ (I Cor. x. 11); all which clearly prove that *aion* doth not indicate eternity (*proper*.) There are ages in the plural,

but there cannot be *eternities plural*; therefore, the rendering of this word in the text, ‘neither in this world (age), nor in the world (age) to come,’ decides nothing definite as to duration; and I cannot, therefore, admit the inference, that “all possible (periods of) existence is devisible (included) in the expression of ‘this world and the world to come.’”

If the original Scriptures had explicitly affirmed that the future punishment of the wicked should endure *as long as God exists*, I think, from the import of such language, perhaps no question could well have arisen on this subject; but as no such fact is thus stated, and no language is used equivalent thereto, I am compelled to demur to the opinion of *eternal* torments; and allow me again to refer you to the *reasons* I have given why I cannot receive this opinion as a revealed truth. Neither am I prepared to admit as truth the translation or rendering of any original word or expression *so as to impeach the Divine goodness*, or that are thus made to appear contrary to those self-evident axioms and attributes which are the true and only basis of religious truth; and I cannot think the arguments deduced from those principles to be a presumption, but logical and true inferences, supported by the whole tenor and scope of Scripture, and you must shew me that those principles and the inferences flowing from them *are false*, before I can abandon them; nay more, you must then also please to provide me with *better*. You seem content to rely “on the slightest assertion,—the least announcement, however slight, or however isolated, (you say) must be piously received, and reverently acquiesced in.” Be it so; but do you not yourself *first judge* of the sense,—the meaning and propriety of such assertions and announcements? And allow me to ask, by what rule or axiom do you test the truth of such passages? for of this we must be satisfied before we can adopt them; and be it remembered, our translators were neither inspired nor infallible, and many are the erroneous renderings and mistranslations recorded.

The tenacity uniformly exercised by the Legal Profession in adhering literally and strictly to the import of *words* is un-

doubtedly needful, and their reading, studies, and habits of thinking all tend to confirm them in such practices; the reason for this may be that words and expressions point out the nature and intention of documents, as well as the desire and bequest of parties, and declare what is the will of a testator, and therefore no rule or test (I mean as first principles) is required to determine their sense. But it is not so in *Theology*, which is a *science*, and instructs us in the knowledge of God and divine things, and *is based on immutable axioms*. A different course of thinking and acting is therefore required from Christian Professors. General fixed principles must be first known and admitted as established axioms, and not departed from in searching for the truth, but brought to bear upon words and expressions in ascertaining their sense, and those principles and axioms must *predicate* to the terms used their true meaning, for words and expressions can never be the rule of the *true*, but the *true* must determine the sense of words, and the *true* must be established on fixed principles,—on immutable truths.

I think you have not sufficiently attended to these distinctions, and have perhaps allowed yourself to be swayed too much by the legal process, (which in your case is perfectly excusable) but you should repudiate this, and adopt the other method when theology is involved, for is it not better for us to adhere to undoubted axioms and principles, which depend upon no book for their truth, than to be agitated and confused by a multitude of opinions taken from the *same book*, which often contradict one another, or prove the source of contradictions? Among other opinions, that of *eternal* torments has not a little contributed towards giving to many thinking persons a decided aversion to Christianity; and what increases our surprise is, to find most Christians, though divided on several other points, united in this! An opinion so injurious to the Deity,—so contrary to all natural equity, is more calculated to make a pyrrhonist than a good man; and this opinion, moreover, is the '*moral restraint*,' as they term it, which they pretend deters men from vice and ungodliness! They undertake to make men virtuous and good

by the idea of a cruel, implacable, and unjust Deity ! The event shews how this pretence has succeeded.

The observations and examples you have stated, as objections and difficulties brought against the Divine goodness, are fully met and more than answered in the digression, to which I still think sufficient attention has not been given, for had you have done so the strife about words would not have been so rife ; however, a few more words appear needful. What is assumed to be told to the “ utter stranger to this world,” is unguarded and incomplete ; it is not ‘ the whole truth,’ and the inferences of this ‘ stranger’ I think are more so, and are founded on the false, consequently they do not meet the facts of the case. And how shall we reconcile men’s ideas of the goodness of God ? According to some, it would be agreeable to Infinite Goodness to exempt men from *all kinds of misery* ! according to others, *eternal* torments are no ways inconsistent with the same Goodness ! ! The problem you submit for solution amounts to this : *To reconcile the existence of unhappiness and woe with the revealed attributes of God ; To vindicate the Divine Goodness in the permission of misery to his creatures.* I know the art of reasoning may indeed make all things appear equally problematical, but it doth not thence follow that they are really so ; men who know how to view things in their origin, who go up to first principles, do not permit themselves to be dazzled with specious arguments ; on the other hand, such as are acquainted with no other evidence of truth than what arises from a long train of arguments, depend more or less on the abilities of those whom they hear argue, and are often reduced to the necessity of successively espousing contraries or opposites.

Now I will undertake the solution of your problem on this condition, that you will try to reconcile and vindicate the Divine character in respect to the other opinion, for this exceeds all my powers of ratiocination, and I believe it is impossible to reconcile the doctrine of **ETERNAL** misery with the Divine goodness and equity ; and when you feel yourself prepared for demonstrating that the system of a miserable *eternity* is more

harmonious than that of a RESTORATION—more worthy of God—more advantageous to mankind—better calculated for clearing up the difficulties and contradictions which divide Christians—then, I say, let me have your solution of such a problem.

Do you know whether the ‘stranger’ and his friend are honest searchers for truth, or are they pugilists, seeking a victory? But to return for our solution, first citing a former observation, “a difficulty advanced against so clear a principle as that of the goodness of God, falls to the ground of its own accord, and the stronger it appears to be we may rest assured it is built upon a *false* principle.” (See digression.) I consider the idea of Infinite Goodness to be a certain immutable principle, and make it the basis of the judgments I form on equivocal effects, whose end I cannot explain. The pristine state, wherein man was placed, has nothing in it but what perfectly corresponds with this principle of Sovereign Goodness; but the miserable state into which he fell, not being prevented by the interposition of the same goodness, this dire event, I say, is shocking. I place this event among the effects whose causes are hidden from me; I know not how far God ought to go in putting the liberty he has bestowed on man to the trial. Here I meet with uncertainty and obscurity in several respects, and therefore go back to what is certain, and what uncertainty cannot shake; hence, I conclude, that one day men will know that Infinite Goodness never was inconsistent with itself, not even in this event, which at present they allege makes against it. It is very true that nothing seems more opposite to immense Goodness than the wretched condition in which all the posterity of Adam are born; here, again, God has not thought proper to invert the order of nature. He might, says one, have deprived Adam of life, and created a second man to be the father of a happy posterity; but do we know whether it would have been consistent with the Divine wisdom and goodness to have proceeded in this manner? Are we acquainted with all the means which the Deity has in his hands

for, sooner or later, more than infinitely compensating the miserable state into which mankind are necessarily born? Here, again, we may judge of uncertainty by what is certain. The uncertainty is the condition of mankind in the life to come; the certainty is two-fold—first, their condition in this life, and the purpose of God to render them all happy. It is certain the design of God must be accomplished *sooner* or *later*, and since it is evident it is not accomplished in this life, consequently it is reserved for the life to come. Another remark that presents itself is, that man being at his birth placed in a state of misery before he could deserve it, goodness, nay equity itself requires, that the state of happiness for which he was created should infallibly await him at the end—that his final condition should necessarily be happy, as his first was miserable for a time before his liberty could be the cause of it. We may even presume that boundless goodness will make this *transient state of misery* an enhancement of happiness; so that men having had knowledge of good and evil, having experienced pain and suffering, will be thereby susceptible of a greater degree of bliss than they could have been had they not passed through such a state. Without this restoration, the recompense would be incomplete and not answerable to the idea of goodness, as we have established it. Men might complain, that they have necessarily suffered ills, from which God could have secured them, or that those ills have not availed to render them happier at last. Here the idea of ETERNAL misery vanishes,—it is not even conceivable how such a thought could enter into the mind of man.

Permit me to introduce your friend, ‘the stranger to this world and its concerns,’ and who has a correct idea of Infinite Goodness, but has never heard talk of a *miserable eternity*; how do we imagine such a person would relish the first proposal of it? what horror would not such an idea give him? He would conclude that those who admit of such a state have a God different from his,—that they never were acquainted with the immense goodness of the supremely happy Being he would

ever conjecture that those who espouse such an opinion feel not within themselves those characteristics of benevolence which are inseparable from human nature ; in fact, this strange opinion degrades the Divine goodness, and places it below human goodness ; it even supposes that God could not foresee what would befall the work of his own hands, that he ventured to give being to an infinite number of creatures without any *certainty* of being able to render them finally happy !

This opinion is the source and soul of the greatest difficulties that can be raised against the idea of the Infinite Goodness. The opinion of *eternal* misery not being admitted, the latter and final state of man is ascertained, and as he was originally created for happiness, so that happiness does infallibly await him, and the design of God, apparently suspended for a time by the incidents of human life, finally prevails and is fully accomplished.

Qy. But how does this gloomy interval of misery and suffering, which we see between man and the reserved bliss, agree with the idea of Infinite goodness ?

I answer, that this interval is by no means the work of God, neither has he fixed the term of it, but has left that much in our own power ; it depends purely on ourselves, by our resistance to or co-operation with the Divine influence, to retard or hasten on that happy time, that state of felicity already purchased for us ; there is nothing wanting but for us to acquire a capacity for enjoying it, and become partakers of His holiness, and for this end to make use both of our liberty and all other means that are put in our hands. Every thing on God's part contributes to our assistance—he makes even the ills of life (which are consequences on the fall of man) concur to the same end, for all the ways of God towards men tend only to their purification. Hence, man himself is the disposer of his own lot, not indeed for eternity—but at least for a season ; that is, it is in his own power to aggravate and prolong his misery ; or, on the contrary, to shorten it. The present life is the season in which, by the good or bad use of time, we may shorten or

prolong the miseries of a future state, for we shall reap in the next life what we have sown in this. Mankind have within themselves the true principles of religion ; these are those first ideas, those universal notions mentioned in the digression. Revelation was not given with a view of rendering those first notions useless, much less with that of contradicting them ; its design is to refer men to them and explain them. Had Christians made this use of revelation, had they stopped at what it teaches in conformity with those notions, could they have resolved to be ignorant of the *detail* of an infinity of things, or at least have left them in suspense what is not clearly unfolded, what rocks of difficulties and contradictions would have been avoided ?

The great ends proposed by the Deity in regard to mankind are very *simple*, and consequently within the reach of human understanding ; but the ways taken by His wisdom for attaining to those ends are infinitely various, and thus become impenetrable to a limited mind. They are the thoughts of God, raised as far above the thoughts of men as infinite is above finite. There is much incongruity in the idea, that God should make a person mad, or deprive him of his reason to bring him to the knowledge of his government ; yet, though we cannot see how it was so, I believe there was a suitableness in the dispensation, when some kind of madness or deprivation of reason was inflicted on Nebuchadnezzar, “ *to make him know that the Most High ruled in the kingdom of men.*” This extraordinary case is perhaps recorded, that we might learn not to be too peremptory in pronouncing about the suitableness of means in the hand of God to produce ends which we cannot perceive to be connected with them. And what particularly renders the ways of Divine wisdom impenetrable is, that it frequently seems to turn its back on its end, and yet that is the very way it reaches it. The sacred history furnishes us with many examples of this kind ; the history of Joseph is one full to our purpose. *God’s design and end only being revealed and made known*, namely, That Joseph was to be the deliverer

of his family. How dark and contrary did the incidents of his life appear to such an event,—how thorny the road he travelled,—what injustice did he meet with,—an innocent person imprisoned like a criminal; would not means so contrary to such an end have puzzled and confounded all our reasoning on their *details*? Now we have seen the end, it is easy for us to admire the ways of Wisdom, which knows how to arrive at its end by contrarieties and opposites; and equity will not lose its right—it will more than compensate all the sufferings of the innocent with a glory which he never acquired without these sufferings, for it brings the agents of injustice to his feet—it makes them feel the retribution of their violence by grievous remorse; in short, they owe their lives to him whom they would have killed. Can a more complete compensation be conceived? What this and such like histories (those of David, Job, Moses, and others, have in the whole some such resemblance with that of Joseph) represent to the view in the little, is what happens at full length, and the *end is reserved for the life to come*.

There are an infinity of particulars in the conduct of Providence which to us *appear unjust*. The majority of the events related in the Scripture do not justify it. Profane history presents us with such tragical spectacles as to give room for doubting whether the Deity regards what passes among men, nor does sacred history furnish us with difficulties less considerable; so many massacres of whole nations, not only permitted, but commanded by Divine wisdom. How shall we reconcile this with the idea of perfect equity? A sentence from Esop might stand for an answer to our problem, “*In all things the end is to be considered.*” The end will unravel all, and what has in this life appeared to us most contrary to the Divine wisdom and equity, will be the subject of admiration to intelligent beings. We are not to judge of the cause by equivocal effects, of which we know not the precise end; but of the effects by the cause, of which we do know the general design. This is the only consideration that can make us feel

satisfied with so many events in all appearance unjust. The general end proposed by God, this absolute design of bringing all men to happiness at last, is sufficient for making us easy ; and though we could not conceive the connexion which such or such effects may have with the general design it matters not, for without our comprehending them distinctly, we in the main conceive that Infinite wisdom can never lose sight of its end, and that those events which seem most contrary to the end proposed are the very means to effect it. Here now is the fixed point on which we may depend, and in which all terminates. This point of view once removed, all is chaos—every thing falls to the ground—we have no longer any certain immutable principle to rest on—we lose the idea of the perfect Being ; for in short, whatever efforts we may make, how is it possible for us to think events, like those just mentioned, equitable, if we consider them separately from the end—from the general design of the Deity *to render all mankind finally happy?*

If we cannot depend on it as an undoubted principle, that there is neither *revenge* nor *cruelty* in God, and that what appears so to us is not so in fact, I ask what idea shall we have of the infinitely perfect Deity—the God of Love?

I will not say that you are another Elymas, if you do not perceive the above to be a solution of our problem, coupled with other matter supplied, but merely warn you lest scales should grow on your eyes, so that you become one.

And remain, dear Sir,

Yours, &c.

R. H.

Maidstone,

March, 1844.

APPENDIX.

SHOULD you, or any other reader, feel desirous of investigating further the doctrine submitted in the preceding letters, there are many works which at different periods have appeared in its favour, both among the more early Christian writers as well as in modern times.

Numerous works may be found on this subject, and I have submitted a list of *some* of those which have been written upon it, in order to shew, that the doctrine of the “restitution of all things” is “not so strange and unusual, nor counted so absurd a tenet by the pious and learned of elder times, as it is by the generality of persons in the present day imagined to be.”
Vide—

ORIGEN, who is celebrated for maintaining that the punishment of the wicked will be limited and corrective, and that they will be ultimately restored to purity and happiness. Origen in fine lib. 8vi. Explanat. in Epist. ad Rom.

CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS, (the Master of Origen) *Adumbrat. in Ep. I Johan.* printed at the end of his treatise, *Quis deus Salvetur.*

GREGORY NAZIANZEN. *Orat quadrag.* Paris edition, 1630.

GREGORY NYSSENUS, in *Dial. de anima et resurrect.* Paris edition, 1659.

SULPICIUS SERVERUS. *De Vita.* B. Martini. 1647.

Among the more modern writers, vide—

Dr. J. W. PETERSEN, (Superintendent of Lunenburg,) at large in folio, and in a smaller work, called “*The Restitution of all things.*”

CONFERENCES upon the *Universal Restitution of the Creation* betwixt Dositheus and Theophilus; a very ingenious work, written in French by a Nobleman and Minister of the Court of the King of Prussia.

THE PHŒNIX—the second vol. printed in 1708, there is an extraordinary paper on this subject; it is remarkable for its scripture criticisms, which would be read with much interest in the present day; the piece is entitled “*Of the Torments of Hell, the foundation and pillars thereof discovered, shaken, and removed; with infallible proofs that there is not a punishment after this life for any to endure that shall never end.*”

Dr. RUST, (Bishop of Dromore) a learned Prelate of the Church of Ireland, the intimate friend of Bishop Jeremy Taylor—“*A Letter of Resolution concerning Origen and the chief of his opinions.*” 1661.

Dr. HENRY MOORE, in his “*Divine Dialogues,*” advocates the doctrine. Printed 1668.

R. STAFFORD,—his book, entitled “*Some Thoughts of the Life to Come.*” 1693.

PETER STERRY, (a German)—“*The Everlasting Gospel Message.*”

SADLER, in his “*Olbia,*” asserts the doctrine.

REV. CAPEL BERROW, A.M. (Rector of Rossington, Notts, and Chaplain to the Hon. Society in Serjeants’ Inn) is a powerful advocate in its favor in his “*Theological Dissertations,*” printed 1772.

Dr. TILLOTSON, (Archb. of Canterbury) seems to incline to this doctrine in his 4th vol. of Sermons, page 164.

LE CLERC, in his *Bibliothèque Choisie*, (1705) p. 292, has explained the views of Tillotson, and more directly advocated Universal Restoration; he also mentions “*Mr. Camphuyse, a*

person famous in Holland," as having publicly declared "that he had been tempted to reject the Christian religion altogether whilst he believed that it taught the *eternity* of torments, and that he never overcame those temptations until he found the threats of the Gospel might be taken in another sense." See also Le Clerc's "*Parrhasiana*," 1701, I. p. 313.

JEREMIAH WHITE, (Chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, and of Trinity Coll., Cambridge)—his book, "*The Restoration of all Things*," printed 1712; he goes indeed upon the Predestinarian scheme, as appears in several passages of his work, but by this additional view makes it quite another thing.

RICHARD COPPIN—his book is called "*Truth's Testimony*," printed 1655.

Dr. T. BURNET, (Master of the Charter House)—his "*De Statu Mortuorum*," printed 1773.

Dr. NEWTON, (Bishop of Bristol) in his "*Dissertations* (lx.) on the final state of Man," is an able and ardent advocate of this doctrine.

Dr. HARTLEY—his celebrated "*Observations on Man*," printed 1791.

Dr. STONEHOUSE, (Rector of Islington)—called "*Universal Restitution*," 1761, a very learned and critical work.

Dr. CHEYNE, a Physician of great learning and abilities, in his "*Discourses*" holds this opinion.

Mr. MARSAY, (a German)—his "*Discourses on subjects relating to a spiritual life*," 1749.

Dr. CHAUNCY, (of Boston, New England)—his book, "*The Mystery hid from ages and generations made manifest by the Gospel dispensation*," 1784.

"UNIVERSAL RESTITUTION" vindicated, in five dialogues, between Witfeltius and Huber, 1773.

W. WHISTON, M.A.—his book, "*The Eternity of Hell Torments considered*."

Rev. R. CLARKE, (Curate of Stoke Newington)—"*A Voice of Glad Tidings to Jews and Gentiles*," 1763.

Rev. W. WORTHINGTON, A.M.—his “Essay on the Scheme and Extent of Man’s Redemption,” 1748.

F. O. PETITPIERRE, (Minister of Chaux de Foud)—his “Thoughts on the Divine Goodness,” 1788.

THE CHEVALIER RAMSAY—“*Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion*,” 2 vols. 4to. 1751.

HARLEIN MISCELLANY, 4to., vol. vi., p. 39, and 8vo., vol. ii., p. 494, 1795.

PAUL SIEGVOLOCK—his book, “*The Everlasting Gospel*,” written originally in German, translated and printed in America, 1753, and reprinted in London, 1792.

“UNIVERSALIST’S MISCELLANY,” 4 vols. printed in 1797.

HENRY BROOKE, in his “*Fool of Quality*,” 4 vol. 1777, distinctly advocates the doctrine.

ELHANAN WINCHESTER—his “Dialogues on Universal Restoration,” edited by W. Vidler, 1799.

Dr. COGAN, M.D.—his “Theological Disquisitions,” 2 vols.

THEOPHILUS LINDSEY, M.A.—“Conversations on the Divine Government,” London, 1802.

Rev. Mr. BROWN, (of Sidney Coll. Cambridge) has written an essay in its favour.

Rev. F. LEICESTER, (of Peter-ho. Camb.)—“*Christ glorified in the Salvation and final Restoration of all Mankind*,” set forth in two sermons, printed 1788.

Rev. ROCHEMONT BARBAULT published some discourses on *Universal Restoration*.

Dr. PRIESTLY expressly advocates the doctrine in his works.

Dr. ESTLIN, (of Bristol)—his “*Discourses on Universal Restitution*,” 1813.

Dr. SOUTHWOOD SMITH, M.D.—his treatise on the “*Divine Government*,” 1826.

Mr. ASPLIN—his book, “*The great Love of God to Man*,” 1758.

JAMES WEAVER—his book, “*Free Thoughts on Universal Restoration*,” 1792.

Mr. WRIGHT, (of Wisbeach)—his “*Essay on future Punishment*.”

Mr. N. SCARLET—his Translation of the New Testament.

Mr. J. SIMPSON—critical “*Essay on the duration of a future state of Punishment and Rewards*,” 1806.

Mr. W. VIDLER’s Letters to Andrew Fuller on “*Universal Restoration*,” 1803.

JOSEPH YOUNG, M.D. (an American Gentleman)—“*Calvinism and Universalism contrasted*.”

LECTURES ON THE PROPHECIES, by E. Winchester, 4 vols.

LORD PRESIDENT FORBES, in his “*Reflections on Incredulity*,” admits the truth of the doctrine.

“*MORSELS OF CRITICISM*,” first vol. by E. King, F.R.A.S. 1792.

“*VINDICATION OF THE HONOR OF GOD; or a Scriptural Refutation of Eternal Misery*.”

Mr. STALEY’s “*Essay on Theology*.”

Mrs. SHERWOOD’s “*Henry Milner*,” part iv., chaps. x., xi. and xx., advocates the doctrine.

A Specimen of True Theology, or Bible Divinity.

by Asplin—1768.

The Religion of Philosophy. by J. Harriott; ^{testament}

Magistrate of the Thames Police

The Rise, Reign & Royalty of the Kingdom 1815.

of God in the Soul of man by Peter Storry

FINIS.

about 1770.

Dr Isaac Barrow. a manuscript, not yet printed.

John Fosters Life & Letters 2 Vol. Letter CCXXI.

1927.

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